

NATIONAL TURFGRASS FEDERATION

Advancing Turfgrass Science for Society

SUMMARY CAPITOL HILL MEETINGS and BOARD MEETING NATIONAL TURFGRASS FEDERATION , INC. OCTOBER 29-30, 2008

On Wednesday, October 29-30, 2008, the Board of Directors of the National Turfgrass Federation (NTF) met in Washington, DC with Federal officials and Congressional staff to discuss many items of interest to the turfgrass industry. The group also met to discuss NTF and how the organization can progress and advance issues important to the turf industry. Representing the turfgrass industry in these discussions were Dr. Mike Kenna, U.S. Golf Association (USGA), Dr. Clark Throssell, Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA), Dr. Brian Horgan, University of Minnesota, Mr. Tom Delaney, Professional Landcare Network (PLANET), Mr. Kirk Hunter, Turfgrass Producers International (TPI), Mr. Kris Kiser, Outdoor Power Equipment Institute (OPEI), Mr. John Farner, Irrigation Association (IA), Mr. Bill Behan and Dr. Mark Schmidt, John Deere and Mr. Kevin Morris, National Turfgrass Federation.

On October 29, the group first met with Dr. Tom Bewick, USDA-Cooperative State Research , Education and Extension Service (CSREES), National Program Leader for Horticulture. The discussions centered around the Specialty Crops Research Initiative included in the 2007 Farm Bill. Dr. Bewick stated that about 300 proposals were submitted, and after proposals were culled for various reasons, about 240 were considered for funding. Many good proposals were submitted, including some turf projects that received high ratings. However, due to a limited amount of funding available in the first year (\$28.4 million), only eighteen research and extension grants were selected. One turfgrass project (Biosolid use in sod production – University of Wisconsin & Virginia Tech) was selected and was in fact, rated the highest of any project. The group inquired about and offered assistance from the turfgrass industry in reviewing next years' projects. Mr. Bewick appreciated our offer and also indicated that \$50 – 100 million will be available for funding next year. In addition, Dr. Bewick suggested that we consider developing a strategic program initiative for turfgrass research within CSREES.

Our next meeting focused on the possibility of a national turfgrass survey being conducted by USDA. We met with Jorge Garcia-Pratts, Douglas Marousek and Lance Honig from the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). NASS collects and reports annual (and sometimes monthly) data for many agricultural and horticultural crops. The only segment of the turf industry that has been surveyed nationally is the sod industry , as a portion of horticultural crops surveyed. Our interest is in the entire turfgrass industry, its size, scope and economic value, as several states have surveyed in the past. This task, depending on the scope, could be daunting for NASS, considering the turf industry is so widely distributed geographically. However, with NASS statisticians in each state, the job is possible and NASS has a great interest in conducting such a survey. The next steps are to determine, for this first survey, the scope and breadth, and approximate funding needed by NASS. Most likely, then the turf industry would work with the Administration and Congress to secure funding.

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The National Turfgrass Research Initiative (NTRI) was the focus of our next meeting, with Dr. Ed Knipling, Administrator, USDA-Agricultural Research Service (ARS). NTRI is a plan to conduct high priority, long-term turfgrass research within ARS. NTRI was also mentioned in the Farm Bill as a high priority research initiative. We expressed our gratitude for Dr. Knipling's support of NTRI within ARS and we also discussed how to move NTRI forward and increase its funding. We also discussed the need for another turf industry customer workshop, like the Dallas 2002 event, and Dr. Knipling agreed that the timing is right. We will need to discuss this further with ARS National Program Staff to identify future dates for a workshop.

To further the discussions on funding for NTRI, the group met with West Higginbotham, Legislative Assistant for Sen. Thad Cochran (R-MS) and Fitz Elder, Agriculture Appropriations staff director for Sen. Robert Bennett (R-UT). We also discussed the need for a national turfgrass survey and the need for funding. It was mentioned that the USDA-Economic Research Service (ERS) addresses social and economic questions posed by various industry. The group plans to contact ERS in the future to discuss opportunities for working with them.

Lastly, we had two meetings to discuss the new EPA's WaterSense draft specifications for new home construction. This draft is problematic as it contains several provisions that either limit the amount of turf in the landscape, or restrict implementation of sound water conservation measures. We first met with Kristen Brainerd, Rep. Jim Costa's staff (D-CA-20th) and then Lacey Kiriakou, staff to Congressman George Radanovich (R-CA-19th). Both House members are leaders of the Congressional Water Caucus. Our conversations with the staffers expressed our problems with the draft specs and how the turf industry and Congress might work with EPA to revise the specs, considering sound science.

On October 30, NTF held its annual Board of Directors meeting. Members discussed the previous day's meetings and determined follow-up actions. NTF will work with USDA-CSREES on the Specialty Crops Research Initiative and potentially, developing a national strategic research plan with CSREES. In addition, NTF will further investigate the potential of working with USDA-NASS in conducting a national turfgrass survey. NTF will consult with USDA-ARS on the best ways to advance and implement NTRI. And finally, NTF will continue to be involved, in conjunction with other groups, with the EPA's WaterSense program and its draft specifications for new home construction.

Other items of interest addressed by the Board of Directors include increasing NTF memberships to enhance NTF's programs. NTF will hire a lobbyist to work on issues for 2009. Also, NTF will develop a strategic plan in 2009. The NTF Board of Directors will meet again in March 2009 to visit with Congress and members of the new Administration.