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### Clippings

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## Understanding the "New" SCMV

Two-virus combination causes lethal necrosis in Floratam St. Augustinegrass

Sugar cane mosaic virus (SCMV) is not new to Florida; it was first identified in the state's sugarcane production areas of southeast Florida in the 1960s, where it affected not only sugarcane, but also corn, sorghum and several types of grasses. Mosaic disease in St. Augustinegrass was named for the broken yellow tile-like pattern that forms along infected blades. It was largely an irritant; mosaic disease caused unsightly symptoms but was not lethal, and turf areas generally recovered. The virus was found on bermudagrasses, paspalum and other St. Augustine cultivars (it has not been reported in zoysiagrasses) and appeared to be confined to south Florida. In the EDIS publication, "Mosaic Disease of St. Augustinegrass Caused by Sugarcane Mosaic Virus", UF plant pathologist Dr. Phil Harmon notes that between 2003 and 2013, "...fewer than five samples with mild symptoms were brought to the attention of the Extension turfgrass pathologist at UF."

### What changed?

In 2011, a turf care professional in Pinellas County (Tampa area) reported mosaic symptoms on Floratam lawns which progressed rapidly in the fall, resulting in severe dieback and eventually, death of the impacted areas. Even more puzzling: areas re-sodded with Floratam St. Augustine died again the following fall.

In 2013, extension agents in the Palm Beach County began receiving reports of similar incidents: lawn areas that exhibited typical mosaic symptoms, but which declined rapidly in the fall and died. As with the Tampa-area cases, turf areas resodded with Floratam St. Augustine typically died the following year, regardless of management strategies. By 2015, it had become a significant problem in residential communities in West Palm Beach.

### Searching for Answers

While the symptoms of these outbreaks were similar to another viral disease - St. Augustine Decline, or SAD, which exists in Texas but has not been reported in Florida - samples tested were negative for the virus known to cause SAD. However, they did reveal something surprising: the presence of a second distinct virus, in addition to the typical causal agent of mosaic disease.

This second *panicovirus* had only recently been identified in bermudagrass and reported in journal



(Continued on page 8)

# News and Notes

**Farm Credit Express: The Key to Easy Equipment Financing:** Take advantage of new tax incentives by financing your next piece of equipment through Farm Credit Express. Farm Credit Express is easy, on-the-spot financing available at your local equipment



dealer with great rates for loans and leasing of new and used equipment. Request a Farm Credit Express loan to

take advantage of cash incentives offered by equipment manufacturers to get the best cash purchase price and lower payment. Farm Credit Express offers loans and leases for new and used farm equipment, ATVs, irrigation systems and agriculture commodity truck and trailers. Once the loan is made, Farm Credit Express customers enjoy the convenience of having a local Farm Credit lender available for support and resources to optimally serve their needs and operation. For more information on Farm Credit Express and a list of participating dealers, visit <http://farmcreditempress.com/#dealers>.

Farm Credit is a cooperative lender, and Farm Credit Express customers have all member advantages, including participation in our unique patronage program. While other lenders share their profits with their stockholders, Farm Credit's borrowers are their stockholders and eligible borrowers share in their profits. Farm Credit Express loans stay local – and so does the service. Questions and concerns are resolved as easily as calling the local Farm Credit office at 866-245-3637. The Farm Credit System has been financing agriculture for over 100 years, working with farmers, ranchers and rural homeowners throughout the United States. For additional information, find the Farm Credit office nearest you at [farmcreditflorida.com](http://farmcreditflorida.com). All loans are subject to credit approval. Certain restrictions and limitations apply.



## HEX Shaft Rollers and Bearings Mean Less Maintenance, More Mowing:

Progressive Turf Equipment is pleased to announce a revision to the roller-end shafts used on all Progressive roller mowers that will increase component life and reduce routine maintenance! All Progressive roller mowers are now equipped with hardened, HEX shaped shafts at each end of the deck rollers as standard

equipment. The HEX design provides positive bearing engagement and ensures that as the mower moves, the supporting bearings will always turn. This eliminates any chance of a round roller-end shaft turning inside the bearing leading to pre-mature failure of both the bearing and shaft. The heavy wall, full length steel rollers remain unchanged, including rounded and reinforced anti-scuff ends. The supporting 2-bolt flange housing is made of ductile iron to withstand the rigors of turfgrass production use. Another first from Progressive; like all Progressive blade spindles, the HEX roller-end bearing is maintenance free and does not require routine greasing saving time and money! This one feature eliminates 12 daily grease points per tri-deck mower, and 20 daily points on the TDR-30; providing owners with peace-

of-mind that a previous routine maintenance point won't be missed! Like many of the other new features Progressive has introduced, older mowers can be updated to the new hardened HEX roller shaft design and HEX bearing without replacing the entire roller or side channels. Now that's Progressive!

## Florikan Launches YLD: An Evolution for Production Agriculture in Florida:



Florikan is proud to announce YLD, a paradigm shift in controlled release fertilizer, targeted precisely at production agriculture in Florida. YLD is engineered to encapsulate inefficient conventional Nitrogen with an innovatedual sealant, patent pending, polymer membrane. The YLD technology delivers a combination of superior efficiency and lower cost that has not been seen before in agriculture in Florida. YLD provides turfgrass producers the following major benefits:

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- **Higher Nitrogen Content:** YLD provides the highest Nitrogen content CRF in the marketplace at 44.5% N. Utilizing YLD will lead to reduced application rates while achieving superior results.
- **Value Per Acre:** YLD's major leap forward in sealant technology and its high N content means increased yield and reduced time to harvest for growers. This is done at a lower overall cost per acre than conventional or competitive options.

Available for immediate delivery from our Florida-based partners: Howard Fertilizer Co. (<http://www.howardfertilizer.com/>) and Wedgworth's (<http://wedgworth.com/>). **Find Us At The TPF Field Day!** The Florikan Turf Sales Team will be at the TPF Field Day, so if you would like to learn more, stop by our booth or contact us directly at <https://www.florikan.com/contact-us>.



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**Bradley Joins TriYield Team:** Bethel TriYield is pleased to announce the addition of David Bradley to the TriYield sales team. Born and raised in Hendersonville, NC, David is a tenth generation farmer who has 25 years of experience with turf. David studied marketing and management at Appalachian State University and became a part of the turf industry when he married his wife Linda. In 25 years on the family turf farm, he has earned a commercial pesticide license and CDL with hazardous material endorsement. He is also a NC Certified Turfgrass Professional, a NC Licensed Landscape Contractor, and a past president of the NC Sod Producers Association. He currently serves on the NC Turfgrass Council and is president of the Western Carolina Horticulture Alliance. You could say David's passion for turfgrass just keeps growing, and he's here to make sure your farm does the same. Contact David today to at [dbradley@triyield.com](mailto:dbradley@triyield.com) or give him a call at (828) 606-7186.

the decks for this specific and necessary task, with future versions offering even more autonomy," Limpert said. "As a result, farmers can trust they will get a perfect cut every time without requiring increasingly scarce and costly labor."



Unlike other industrial mowers, the M220 features:

- Front-mounted mowing decks for a 22-foot-wide precision cut (with speeds up to 10 mph) before anything runs over the turf.
- One-touch height adjustments, enabling operators to change the height while maintaining the precise level of the mower's decks.
- High flotation tires and balanced design, which keep fields in great condition, minimizing soil compaction and rutting.
- No PTOs—The M220's elegant design allows direct power transfer without gears and power take-off (PTO) shafts to wear out. Eliminating PTO's provides increased safety, more efficient power, and decreased ongoing maintenance. No more belt slipping or greasing PTOs and U joints.
- Automated, adaptive speed control for optimal mowing speeds for each environment.
- A high comfort, high visibility, climate controlled cab that provides full heating and A/C, comfort suspension seating, Bluetooth stereo system and cup holders.

For more information regarding FireFly's M220, please visit: [fireflyequipment.com/m220](http://fireflyequipment.com/m220).

**FireFly Automatrix' New Self-Propelled, Hybrid Mower Cuts Cost Per Acre Mowed:** FireFly Automatrix, Inc. has launched the M220, a revolutionary self-propelled, hybrid turf mower that enables the fastest precision cut possible, while decreasing the average cost per acre. According to FireFly CEO Andrew Limpert, increasing labor costs and labor shortages continue to threaten the future of farming in the United States, so automating manual repetitive tasks is critical to its survival. "While sod harvesting only happens once a year, it needs to be mowed weekly to keep it healthy, so we've expressly designed and built this mower from the engine to

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# Growing Better 2018

## The TPF Annual Meeting & Field Day



## Events



### Annual Meeting Lunch

Thursday, May 3 | Mission Inn Resort | 10:30 AM - 12:30 PM

Catch up on the latest with TPF and the Florida industry at the Annual Meeting Lunch. We're especially pleased to welcome guest speaker Rich Budell, discussing current issues in water supply planning and permitting, and featured speaker Nathan Whitaker, co-author of Tony Dungy's memoir *Quiet Strength* and *Through My Eyes* with Tim Tebow, as this year's guest speaker. You'll not want to miss this one! (\$45 per person)



### Skeet Shoot

Thursday, May 3 | Mission Inn | 1:30 - 5:00 PM

Sign up individually to be placed on a team or gather a group of your favorite shooting buddies for an enjoyable afternoon on the Mission Inn's El Cazador Range. Prizes will be awarded for the top finishing teams and top scorer. (\$75 per person)



### Reception & Dinner

Thursday, May 3 | Mission Inn | 6:30 - 9:00 PM

Relax and unwind at the Mission Inn's La Hacienda Restaurant for our Field Day casual reception and buffet dinner. Visit with old friends, catch up with colleagues, sharpen your negotiating skills for our Reverse Draw, and see what else we're cooking up this year! (\$50 per person)



### Field Day & Trade Show

Friday, May 4 | Lake Jem Farms | 8:30 AM - 1:30 PM

From cutting edge innovation to tried and true reliability, explore products and services designed to help your business thrive. Grab a cup of coffee, browse through vendor displays and don't miss our raffle. Admission includes the always amazing **Everglades Farm Equipment** lunch. (\$45 per person)

## Schedule

### THURSDAY, MAY 3

**8:30 AM - 4:00 PM**  
Equipment Vendor Move-In  
Lake Jem Farms  
(Wednesday move in may be available; please call)

**10:30 AM - 12:30 PM**  
Annual Meeting Lunch  
with guest speaker  
Nathan Whitaker  
Mission Inn Conference Center

**1:30 - 5:00 PM**  
Skeet Shoot  
El Cazador Range  
Mission Inn Resort

**6:30 - 9:00 PM**  
Reception & Dinner  
La Hacienda Restaurant  
Mission Inn Resort

### FRIDAY, MAY 4

**7:30 - 8:15 AM**  
Tabletop Vendor Move-in

**8:30 AM**  
Registration & Breakfast  
Trade Show Begins

**9:30 AM**  
**NEW**  
Pop-Up Seminar:  
What's Under the Hood? How Tier 4 and New Technology are Changing Equipment Management

**10:30 AM**  
Equipment Demonstrations

**12:00 PM**  
Lunch

**1:30 PM**  
Show Closes  
Vendors Move Out

## Host Farm

### Lake Jem Farms

16929 County Road 48  
Mount Dora, Florida 32757  
352-383-7196 | www.lakejemfarms.com



We're especially grateful to Keith Truenow of Lake Jem Farms, host of this year's Growing Better Field Day. Located just north of Orlando in the Mount Dora area, Lake Jem produces a wide variety of turfgrasses - bahia, bermuda, St. Augustine and zoysia - for both residential and commercial sales and is a leader in the Florida industry. In September 2017, rains from Hurricane Irma caused catastrophic flooding at Lake Jem and devastated the sod production operation. In the wake of the disaster, TPF offered to cancel or move the Field Day, but Keith, a long-time TPF board member and past president, replied in his trademark fashion: "Nope. We'll make it work." So while you're there, be sure to take a few moments to say thanks to Keith and the Lake Jem crew! Due to the challenges caused by Hurricane Irma, the exact field location for the Friday Field Day may not be determined until late April. Please watch for details at [www.floridaturf.com/events](http://www.floridaturf.com/events) and look for the "Turf Producers Event" signs as you approach the farm.

## Host Hotel

### Mission Inn Resort

10400 County Road 48  
Howey in the Hills, Florida 34737  
Tel: 1-800-874-9053 | www.missioninnresort.com



Nestled on 1,100 acres among central Florida's rolling hills, the Mission Inn Resort offers luxury accommodations, championship golf, and fine dining in a charming, Spanish-style setting just 35 minutes north of Orlando. All Thursday activities - the Annual Meeting Lunch, Skeet Shoot, and the Reception and Dinner - will be held at the Mission Inn.

The TPF group rate \$145 per night (plus applicable taxes) may still be available, but is not guaranteed after April 4 (the group room cut off date). Call the Mission Inn directly and ask for the TPF group rate (no special code is needed).

## Exhibit Space

**Tabletop and Equipment Exhibit Space** is available for Friday's Field Day at Lake Jem. Exhibit space includes Friday-only admission and lunch for company representatives (basic exhibit space does not include admission to Thursday events). See the Exhibitor Registration form at [www.floridaturf.com/events](http://www.floridaturf.com/events) for details and **reserve your space by Friday, April 27.**

## Sponsorships

**Sponsorships** help us provide the best business and educational events and are a great way to give an extra boost to TPF or say "thanks!" to your customer-members. Many levels include exhibit space, admission to events or advertising opportunities that make them a great value. See the Sponsorship Opportunities form or give us a call and let us customize something just for you. **Deadline to be included on event signage is Friday, April 20.**

Can't join us, but want to help out? How about a donation for our Bucket Raffle or a Door Prize for our Annual Meeting? We'll be sure you're recognized and our growers will appreciate your support.

### Raffle Sponsors

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Growing Better Annual Meeting Speaker

## Where's the Water?

Budell Discusses Water Supply Planning and Impacts on Permitting



*Rich Budell, Budell Water Group*

As Florida once again welcomes nearly 1,000 new residents a day, the state is scrambling to meeting legislatively mandated deadlines for explaining just how - and where - the water will come from to meet the needs of an anticipated 15 million new residents by 2070.

All stakeholder use is being reviewed with an eye to reducing consumption in order to make water available for future use. And agricultural users, who have for years steadily reduced their use and scrupulously managed permitted amounts, are feeling an additional pinch.

"Several of our members who have been working on Consumptive Use Permit (CUP) renewals have found the process to be increasingly complex, to the point of requiring professional consultants to help them be sure they've navigated their water management district's requirements correctly," said TPF executive director Betsy McGill. "And procedures among the state's five water management districts can vary widely."

In order to help members better understand both the underlying goals of these water efforts and how it may be impacting farms now and well into the future, TPF has invited veteran water policymaker Rich Budell to discuss these issues

at our 2018 Growing Better Annual meeting lunch on Thursday, May 3 at the Mission Inn Resort.

Rich Budell has more than 30 years' experience developing and implementing water resource protection and conservation policy and programs. He served as Director of the Office of Agricultural Water Policy with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services for 17 years and has appeared before United States House and Senate Congressional Committees on multiple occasions concerning water policy. Budell served on the National Academy of Sciences panel evaluating water restoration projects in the Chesapeake Bay watershed and is a former Chair of the Scientific Advisory Group for the Everglades.

Budell will join featured speaker **Nathan Whitaker** for the kick-off event of this year's 2018 Growing Better Annual Meeting & Field Day. The luncheon will begin at 10:30 AM; registration is required (\$45 per person; complimentary for university faculty, students and Extension personnel). Register online at [www.floridaturf.com/events](http://www.floridaturf.com/events).



Growing Better Pop-Up Seminar

## What's Under the Hood?

How Tier 4 and New Technology are Changing Equipment Management

**"Technology is a good thing - until it isn't" just might sum up how you're feeling about your equipment these days.**

The EPA mandate for off-road diesel engines to meet strict emission standards (Tier 4, which went into effect in 2014) coupled with ever-evolving technology has created a major shift in how equipment is operated and maintained and has had a profound impact on the relationship between dealers and customers. It can also make operator training more challenging (and more critical) and repairs more frustrating.

TPF is hosting a pop-up seminar on how these new technologies have and will impact your farm operation at our Growing Better Field Day at Lake Jem Farms on Friday, May 4, with representatives from several major dealers who can help you with questions you may have about these changes.

Todd Bachman with Florida Coast Equipment will give a general overview of some key changes, including how data is collected for predictive maintenance and how warranties are

impacted by the data collected. Jason Tucker with Everglades Farm Equipment and Lonnie Bertsch with MST Sod Equipment will also be on hand.

Growing Better Pop-Up seminars are designed to be short and to-the-point, giving you the information you need without a lot of fluff. The session will be held in the main tent area starting at 9:30 AM (check in when you arrive for the exact location).

**This is an ideal session for your key operators, production managers, and mechanics, or if you have recently purchased or plan to purchase new equipment.**

Regular Field Day registration is required; you do not need to register for the Pop-Up seminar in advance, but seating is limited.

*Photos courtesy of Everglades Farm Equipment and Florida Coast Equipment.*



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Figure 1. In this SCMV infected lawn, the brown areas are Floratam St. Augustine. The darker green grass is a different St. Augustine cultivar. Photo courtesy of Dr. Phil Harmon.

publications by researchers in Beltsville, MD. Working with funding from the Office of the Dean for Research, Dr. Harmon and other UF researchers sequenced the genomes from samples of infected and non-infected grasses to identify this second virus and have concluded that it is the *panicovirus* strain found in bermudagrass. All of the infected Florida samples exhibiting lethal necrosis have tested positive for both the original SCMV *potyvirus* and *panicovirus*. The source of this virus and how it was introduced into Florida is not known at this time.

Another factor unique to the virus is that it appears to have a temperature trigger. Decline typically begins in September-October, or when temperatures fall below 65 degrees Fahrenheit, which is consistent with results from greenhouse testing. Floratam St. Augustine seems to be the most severely impacted; other St. Augustine cultivars may exhibit symptoms but do not appear to develop severe necrosis (Fig. 1).

### Areas Reported

The majority of cases reported to the UF Rapid Turf Diagnostic Service as of January 2018 were in the Palm Beach County area (Fig. 2). Samples have tested positive in neighboring counties, including Martin, Indian River, and Miami-Dade and Broward Counties. At least two instances have been report in north



Figure 2. Counties with known positive samples of lethal necrosis of St. Augustinegrass consistent with infection by combination virus.

Florida (Columbia and Clay Counties), but these were not as severe as those in southern Florida nor as widespread (Figure 2).

### Mode of Transmission

Patterns of spread within infected areas indicate that the virus is being spread from lawn to lawn by mowers, trimmers and other equipment through clippings and sap. (Fig. 3). **To date, no infections have been found on sod farms;** it does not appear that the infections have originated from the farm level. Lawn care companies are being advised to allow equipment to dry between jobs; to remove clippings from equipment *and leave them in place* (no transport), and/or to fully decontaminate equipment between job sites to avoid carrying the virus from one area to another (this includes boots or gloves that could harbor sap). It's also recommended that clippings not be removed from infected properties.



Figure 3. Infected lawn showing viral spread consistent with mower tracks. Photo courtesy of Dr. Phil Harmon.

### Management and Replacement

At present, there is no effective treatment for the virus. Lawns replaced with Floratam St. Augustine have typically died in the fall, so replacement with alternate cultivars or varieties is recommended. At the recent TPF Regional Meeting, Dr. Harmon noted that Palmetto and Bitter Blue are referenced in the EDIS publication "Mosaic Disease of St. Augustinegrass Caused by Sugarcane Mosaic Virus" as potential alternatives. In early observations, lawns replanted with these two cultivars survived (they may develop symptoms but did not experience the lethal necrosis associated with Floratam). However, additional testing has indicated that other St. Augustine cultivars may also be tolerant and be acceptable replacements.

### Implications for Sod Producers

From a practical standpoint, sod producers who offer renovation and installation services should be the most concerned, particularly if you work in or near areas where infection has been reported. If you install your own products, consider:

- **Educating your employees.** Make sure your employees (or at the least, your job foreman) understand the threat and have accurate information about it.
- **Establishing a protocol for decontamination** of equipment between jobs and/or before returning to the farm

- (don't forget about boots, gloves, and pallets).
- Determine the best way to **dispose of rip-out material** to avoid spreading it to other sites or worse, to your production fields.
  - **Consider limiting customer traffic to your fields**, especially if they are working in areas of known infection.

### PR and Public (Mis)Information

Perhaps just as important as the practical implications is the public perception of this issue and combatting some of the misinformation that's already made its way online.

Everyone from UF/IFAS Extension offices to local landscapers have posted information about this issue online, especially if they work in areas where outbreaks have been reported. Some of the information is excellent, like Palm Beach County Extension agent Bill Schall's page and Hillsborough County agent Susan Haddock's post, while some of it is just plain wrong (one pest control company website advises customers that it is caused by the "poliovirus"). From a customer relations and PR standpoint, there are several things you can do.

**Invest time in keeping up with the current research and share that information with your employees.** The benefits are three-fold. Employees feel more confident (they're not making up answers or giving incorrect ones), customers are reassured and informed (they don't interpret your answers as avoiding the question, and you can give them the right information), and you don't have to deal with a hot mess created by a frustrated customer and a well-meaning but clueless employee.

**Equip your front office staff with a respectful but general reply for customers who call.** One of the best is also the simplest: "I'm not the best person to answer your question, but let me transfer you to ....., or "...but I'll be glad to take a message for (designated person) so he /she can call you back."

**Designate one person to field calls and develop more detailed answers.** Give them the additional information and guidance they need to answer tough questions in a way that is accurate but comfortable for you. Here are a couple of examples:

#### "Is your sod certified as SCMV-free?"

"Farms are not being tested or certified as SCMV-free, because so far, the virus has only been found in lawns and landscapes. But we only sell sod that is, to the best of our knowledge, healthy and free of diseases or pests."

#### "I got some sod from you, and now it's infected!"

"Well, to date, this virus hasn't been found on sod farms. They have found that it spreads easily by mowers, trimmers and any equipment, so it may have been spread from another infected lawn."

### Further Research and Testing Samples

Dr. Harmon and other researchers at UF are continuing to work on this issue, testing the tolerance of other St. Augustine cultivars, exploring how the virus is spread, and collaborating with others who are working to develop a definitive diagnostic test for the *panicovirus* that is present in these outbreaks.

If you're interested in submitting samples from your farm for testing, Dr. Kevin Kenworthy and graduate student Jamie Buhlman are sampling Floratam St. Augustine and Bitter Blue as part of another project; samples submitted will blind-labeled and forwarded to the Rapid Turf Diagnostic Service for testing for the presence of the viruses. There is no cost to the producer and reports are strictly confidential.

### Questions?

Dr. Harmon can be reached at pfharmon@ufl.edu or 352-273-4622. For information on the Kenworthy-Buhlman project, contact TPF at 863-675-2144 or email [betsymcgill@floridaturf.com](mailto:betsymcgill@floridaturf.com).

## Welcome New Members!

### Producer Members

#### Sod Central LLC

Shawn Tucker | Kenansville, Florida  
(407) 508-6696 | [sodcentral@yahoo.com](mailto:sodcentral@yahoo.com)  
Producing: Bahia, Floratam St. Augustine

#### South Ft. Meade Land Management Sod

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# Harvesting the Perfect Piece of Turf

John Owens, Brouwer Kesmac

Once you've grown the best turf that Mother Nature will allow you to produce, the next step is to get a uniform block of turf onto the

pallet - a process that starts at the harvester cutting head.

Did you know that your cutting head has adjustments on it? I don't think that some growers realize this, as you can tell by the paint and the bolts that they have never been adjusted. Your harvester is a precision cutting machine that is designed to lift a block of turf that has accurate dimensions and a consistent thickness from side to side, front to back. Since you are not in the topsoil business, you want to cut accurately so that you can include the ideal soil amount, but no more than needed. When the conditions change, you may have to change the adjustments to adapt to moisture, maturity, variety, stones, soil conditions, and other factors. The following tips will make sure that your cutting head is adjusted to best suit the conditions that you are cutting in.

**Start with the basics.** The best turf will come up the conveyor if it is cut with a sharp blade with sharp side blades. A dull blade will tear the roots and not provide a clean finished appearance. The speed of the blade also needs to be fast enough to make a clean cut, but not so fast that it will shake the soil from the roots.

**Perfect pitch.** The pitch of the blade is often neglected. Running as flat as possible will produce the best quality of cut. Increased pitch is required when the ground is dry and hard, and in heavier (more mineral based) soils. If the ground is hard and dry, a flat pitch will tend to lift the conveyor out of the ground and scalp the turf. Too much pitch in soft ground will draw the head into the ground, even to the point of burying the roller.

**Mind the gap.** Another adjustment that is often overlooked is the distance between the blade and the roller. When the blade is in the forward position of its cutting stroke, the ideal location is 1 ½" behind the center line of the roller. The roller provides a pressure point for the blade to produce an even and consistent cut. In some conditions, it may be necessary to widen the gap. If you have small stones, they may get stuck between the blade and the roller. Opening up the gap can often eliminate that problem.

Thick turf can also require a little more gap. If the roller is too far forward, and the space is too wide (2 ½ to 3"!!) the turf will be ragged and inconsistent in thickness. If the space is too narrow (1' or less) the blade will pinch the turf. This can stop the roller intermittently and cause a long piece of turf. It can also cause the cutting head to lift and scalp the turf. Remember to check the roller gap dimension if you change the pitch on your blade. If you add pitch, the gap will increase; if you flatten the pitch, the gap will get less.

**What's your angle?** The correct angle is also critical to achieving the best cut. Before you begin, do this quick check:

1. Is the blade at a right angle to the cutting head?
2. Is the roller at a right angle to the cutting head?
3. Is the roller parallel to the blade?
4. Is the conveyor parallel to the tractor?

If any one of these is out of adjustment, the thickness of the turf will vary from side to side.

The blade may not be at right angle to the frame if the crank-shaft bearings or the top pivot bearings are not aligned. The roller may not be at right angle to the blade if it was not aligned when adjusting the gap between the roller and the cutting blade. The roller may not be parallel to the blade if the correct shims are not on the roller bearings, or if the bearings are different brands (different brands have different heights on the pillow block bases).



If you have never changed any of these adjustments, it may be because you have perfectly consistent soil and moisture conditions every day of the year! But if not, remember that investing a little time and incorporating the proper adjustments can help insure that the beautiful turf you labored to produce will be equally beautiful on the pallet.

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# Alachua County's Turf SWAP Rebates:

Despite great goals and creative execution, this grant program gets it wrong on turfgrass

At the recent UF/IFAS Urban Landscape Summit, senior planner Stacie Greco of the Alachua County Environmental Protection Department shared details on a program available to homeowners and businesses within the county that reimburses up to 50% (or up to \$2,000) of the cost of making permanent changes to their landscapes and irrigation systems.

The goal of the program, dubbed "Turf SWAP" ("Save Water, Add Plants") is to "permanently remove high volume irrigation to save water immediately and in the future", Greco explained. It's based on other turf removal programs, including the San Antonio Water System's "Cash for Grass" effort of several years ago.

The EDP launched the program in 2017 with a \$300,000 springs protection grant received from the St. Johns Water Management District. That grant program was created to fund projects focused on reducing irrigation water use and improving flow to the area's springs. The program runs until funds are depleted or through January 2019. In April 2018, Greco told the [Gainesville Sun](#) that about 75% of the funds were still available.

Those interested in participating in the program must first complete an application which includes a scope of work, irrigation design plan and a plant list for the proposed project. All work other than removal of grass must be done by an accredited "SWAP Shop" partner landscaper (currently, there are ten), described as a landscaping professional who has received state and local training and is Florida Water Star certified (FWS is a voluntary program created by the St. John's Water Management District - learn more at [www.floridawaterstar.com](http://www.floridawaterstar.com)).

Designs must be approved in advance by the EPD; homeowners may also need approval of their HOA. SWAP Shop partners must fill out invoices documenting the work done, which is paid for by the participant, who can then submit this documentation to the EDP for reimbursement. Rebates typically arrive in 4-6 weeks.

## Rebate funds may be used for:

- Removing high volume irrigation (>0.5 gallon per minute). Microirrigation may be added to these areas.
- Capping off high volume irrigation heads if the heads cannot be removed.
- Reconfiguring irrigation zones so microirrigation is on a separate zone.
- Removing turf grass (if high volume irrigation is also removed).
- Designing, purchasing, and installing Florida Friendly Plants where high volume irrigation is removed.
- Purchasing and spreading mulch (no Cypress mulch), soils, soil amendments, and/or weed cloth where high volume irrigation is removed.
- Installing or replacing rainfall shut off devices (including soil moisture sensors and smart controllers).

## Rebate funds may not be used for:

- Replacing landscaping beds or turf that does not have high

volume irrigation.

- Adding plants to existing mulched areas/beds or to areas where high volume irrigation is not removed.
- Installing or maintaining backflow prevention.
- Applying fertilizers, pesticides, or herbicides.

The program has incorporated social media marketing to reach specific audience segments with targeted messaging on water conservation, as well as promoting the program through radio (NPR) and local media stories. As of April 2018, Greco reported that 39 SWAP projects had been completed and reimbursed (at 24% of available funding) and over 115,000 square ft of high volume irrigation removed, for an estimated water savings of about 6 million gallons annually.

## So what's wrong with this picture?

The program goals of reducing wasted irrigation water and protecting sensitive springs are on-target. And the combination of local and social media outreach on the program have been creative and well-executed. However, in trying to make the program simple to understand and "sticky" (a marketing term for memorable), turfgrass gets an undeserved black eye. And the messages about how to achieve conservation and what makes a landscape "Florida Friendly" are not, from my perspective, totally accurate.

Even the program title sends a pretty clear message that removing turf equals water savings and that "plants" are somehow better (which is confusing, since turf is a plant). It also references removing turf and adding planting beds or mulched areas to promote Florida Friendly Landscaping, when the FFL principal actually states, "Right Plant, Right Place". While we're the first to agree that turf isn't the correct choice for every landscape area, it can be a *good choice* that provides many benefits that just can't be duplicated by planting beds or mulch.

The reality is that conserving water is the combination of good landscape choices, good irrigation design, and let's face it - good behavior (using and maintaining an irrigation system properly) - that saves water.

Alachua County's 2016 revision of their irrigation code is, arguably, a much more effective way to address water conservation, particularly since they have coupled it with funding for inspection and enforcement. Greco reported that in the first 21 months of the new requirements, 377 jobs were submitted to the county; 51% were randomly inspected, and roughly 32% failed. (Three repeat failures result in loss of self-inspection status). Efforts like this could be even more effective if coupled with soil moisture sensors, water metering or water budgets.

While we applaud the initiative and the execution, it's time that we found a way to promote great landscaping and water use efficiency without unfairly targeting turf, just because it's "sticky".

- Betsy McGill

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# How I Reduced Robocalls by About 95%

The unsolicited calls made to your cell phone are a huge annoyance. Here's what to do.

by Gene Marks, [www.genemarks.com](http://www.genemarks.com)

Been getting a lot of robocalls lately? Yeah, join the club. You know what I mean. These are unsolicited calls made to your cell phone. They come in waves – sometimes ten or eleven in a row, particularly if you don't pick them up. Sometimes they identify themselves as "robocaller" but not often. Usually, the calls "spoof" another local number so you think it may be a friend, a customer, a client or – worse – a prospect that wants to talk with you. When you pick up the call, sometimes you hear nothing at all. Other times it's a recording that's trying to sell health insurance, a free vacation or some other type of nonsense. Who's buying these things? Apparently someone.

Robocalls are a huge problem. According to this USA Today report from last week, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) gets about 200,000 complaints every year and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) logged in 4.5 million complaints in 2017 alone. Mind you, this is based on just the people that actually take the time to report this annoyance to the government. Most of us don't. We just get angry.



Image: istockphoto.com

The anger is warranted. Robocalls are not only annoying, they're extremely distracting, unproductive and expensive. The FTC says that the cost of all of these unwanted calls is about \$9.5 billion annually. So what to do? There's no silver bullet to fix this problem, but I've found a solution that has reduced my robocall problem by about 95 percent.

First, let me share with you what NOT to do. Don't answer the call. When you do this you're essentially announcing to the computer on the other line that hey, here's a live one! Once a call is answered with a human voice, your number is then logged into the "good" column and then repeatedly sold to telemarketers for future harassment. Also, go ahead and sign up your number with the FTC's do-not-call registry but just know that it's mostly ineffective – the government is stepping up its efforts to combat this nuisance through increased fines, better coordination with phone companies and more accurate data tracking, but they're still far behind the eight ball.

My Samsung Galaxy S8 gives me the option to individually block numbers but I have to do this for each incoming call. Not only does this take a few seconds but the action just sends all remaining calls to voicemail, which is not a great solution because then I get multiple notifications with multiple empty voicemail messages. More recent versions of the iPhone and Android (as well as paid options at Verizon, T-Mobile and other carriers) can allow you to block all calls from people not on your contact list, but that's not optimal either – what if a prospect is

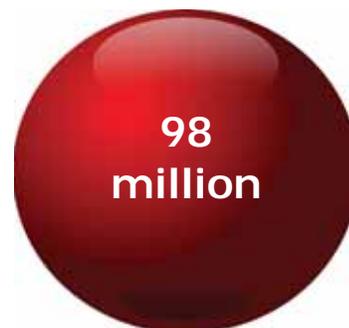
calling? Doing this could cost me business.

I have found something that mostly works: a third party app. I've tried a few of them and the best one is called **Nomorobo**. The app, created by Long Island developer Aaron Foss, works about 95 percent of the time and for someone who's in the technology business, that's about as good as I can expect from any software program. Here's the deal on this.

You can get it from the iTunes or Google Play store. It costs \$20 a year for the mobile version. It also works with landlines – so much so that services like Xfinity have adopted it for their own phone customers. Nomorobo installed quickly on my phone and immediately began intercepting all suspect robocalls. It compares the caller ID against its vast and dynamic database of phony phone numbers. If a match is made I never see the call. I can also report individual numbers that make it through (and some do). The solution is by no means 100 percent. But I've found it to be very effective nonetheless. Where I was at one time receiving anywhere between 3-5 robocalls a day with each calling me 5-10 times (argh!) I now rarely receive a robocall – maybe a couple times a week at most. I can live with that.

One final note: Nomorobo isn't the only game in town. There are other good apps like Hiya and Robokiller that I've also tried that have also received very positive reviews from their users – you should test them out, too. It's just that I've personally found Nomorobo to be the best. For me, the \$20 a year is worth it.

-This column originally appeared on March 28, 2018 on **Inc.** ([www.inc.com](http://www.inc.com)); reprinted by permission.



The estimated number of robocalls Americans receive daily.

Source: USA Today, March 26, 2018

EREF Update:

## Manatee County: A Disappointingly Close Vote

Mac Carraway, Consulting Executive Director



After scoring some victories in 2017, the new year has gotten off to a less-than-desirable start in some respects. Most notably, EREF recently petitioned Manatee County's Board of County Commissioners one-by-one to consider a workshop to discuss potential changes to their existing fertilizer ordinance which includes a punitive summertime fertilizer blackout. Our "ask" was to simply amend the ordinance to include additional exemptions for licensed lawn-care professionals and for BMP-trained homeowners.

The Commission agreed, and the workshop was held on March 13, 2018. During the workshop, County staff gave a lengthy presentation supporting the ordinance as written and recommending no changes. EREF, along with Todd Josko representing TruGreen and Robert Luria representing Scotts Miracle Gro, presented the case for the exemptions.

Unfortunately, the County's presentation ran very long and EREF was unable to complete its presentation as promised by the County. While not considered a formal vote, the Commission agreed with staff 4-3 to leave the ordinance alone.

It is impossible to say whether completing the presentation would have changed the outcome, but the circumstances and

the narrow loss were obviously very disappointing. With that said, the County's presentation was nothing much new, and never addressed our assertion that professionals and knowledgeable homeowners are NOT part of nutrient impairments in Manatee County.

EREF fully intends to continue this new offensive in Manatee County and in other locales where these ordinances exist. Looking ahead, EREF will need enhanced resources plus more active stakeholder engagement to effectively combat the enormous resources deployed against the green industry by activists and certain local governments.

As always, we thank TPF for its continued support, and to Betsy McGill for her wisdom and leadership on the EREF Board of Directors.

### Keep up with the latest!

Sign up for the EREF newsletter at [www.eref florida.com](http://www.eref florida.com) to receive updates on current issues and how we're working on behalf of the green industries.

Update:

## Florida's Constitutional Review Committee Proposals

In the last issue of *Clippings*, we shared information on Florida's Constitutional Review Committee, which meets every 20 years and can make recommendations for amendments to the state's governing document that may be placed directly on the ballot for voter consideration. Here's an update on the three proposals that Jim Spratt highlighted in that story as of special concern to agricultural operations:

### **Proposal 23:** Establishes every person has a right to a clean environment.

As a proposed amendment to Florida's state constitution, Proposal 23 was originally intended to give the legal right to anyone, anywhere, for any reason, to intervene against any actions which "impact the natural environment." While the proposal was later scaled back to make it more palatable, it was nevertheless stopped in its tracks. Fortunately, Proposal 23 is dead.

### **Proposal 48:** Establishes the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission shall exercise the regulatory and executive authorities over habitat and habitat corridors.

Proposal 48 sought to expand the authority of Florida's Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission over wildlife habitats and corridors. In effect, Proposal 48 could have created a duplicative

permit process with FDEP and FWC and allowed FWC to acquire private property under the banner of wildlife habitat and corridors. Fortunately, Proposal 48 is also now dead.

### **Proposal 29:** Requires employers to verify employment eligibility using the Federal Employment Authorization Program (E-Verify) or successor program.

However, Proposal 29 is alive and kicking. It requires Florida to establish an employment eligibility verification process to ensure all employees in the state are legally authorized to work under applicable federal immigration law and in a manner consistent with federal law. It also directs the State of Florida to create a random auditing program with penalties to ensure compliance. An earlier version of this proposed amendment to Florida's state constitution sought to mandate employer use of the automated federal E-Verify system which is a voluntary system. The next stop for Proposal 29 is consideration by the full Constitution Revision Commission during April. At least 22 of the 37 commissioners must vote 'yes' in order to push Proposal 29 onto the general election ballot in November.

Special thanks to Ben Bolusky with FNGLA for keeping us posted on the status of the committee and these proposals.

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