

Turfgrass Industry Facts in Georgia

Benefits of Turfgrass

Turfgrasses are the primary vegetative covers on airports, athletic fields, cemeteries, churches, commercial buildings, golf courses, home lawns, schools, parks and roadsides. While turfgrasses are typically thought of for recreation and aesthetic value, they also provide a valuable environmental service by preventing soil erosion from wind and rain, reducing runoff from rainfall, improving soil absorption and infiltration of water, remediation of contaminated or polluted water, fire abatement, and other beneficial environmental impacts. Additionally, turfgrasses are an integral component of the landscape that positively influences human behavior characteristics like improved ability to concentrate and self-discipline.

Turfgrass Industry Size

The exact size of the turfgrass industry in Georgia is not known since a detailed survey has never been conducted. However, estimates suggest that at 1.8 million acres, it is clearly one of the largest agricultural commodities in the state. The estimated cost to maintain an acre of turfgrass is \$570; this includes all segments of the industry (golf, sports fields, commercial and homelawn). If extrapolated over the entire acreage, the equates to over \$1 billion per year spent on maintaining turfgrass in Georgia.

Home Lawns

There are an estimated 1.25 million acres of home lawns in Georgia. Homeowners spend about \$260 per acre annually to maintain their lawns for a total of \$325 million per year. Generally, lawns represent the largest segment based on acreage of the industry.

Professional Landscape and Turfgrass Industry

Based on a 1998 UGA survey, the Professional Turfgrass and Landscape Industry had annual gross revenue of \$3.4 billion. These firms employed over 12,000 full-time and 6000 part-time people. The industry was relatively young with 61% of the firms being less than 11 years old.

Golf Course Industry

Based on a 2002 Georgia State University survey, the 520 golf courses/ranges in Georgia had a economic impact of \$1.8 billion. The employment impacts were 16,948 full-time and 10,874 part-time workers. In 1999, Georgia was ranked 8th in the country in the number of new courses opened (19), 8th in the courses under construction (31), and Georgia was one of six states that were in the top 10 in the country in both these categories (National Golf Foundation, 2000). The golf course industry is also significant to the tourism industry and to the enhancement of property values through the associated housing developments.

Sod Production Industry

The 2007 Center for Agribusiness & Economic Development Turf Survey compiled by the University of Georgia reported there were over 50,595 acres used for sod/stolons. The farm gate value was \$164 million, a 2.3% decrease from 2006. The sale represents only the first step only the first step in turfgrass's use. After being installed it is maintained for indefinite period which further contributes to the State's economy. In 2009, the Georgia Crop Improvement Association reported 11,535 acres of certified grass in production which is a decrease from 2008. The represents five warm-season species (bermudagrass, centipedegrass, seashore paspalum, St. Augustinegrass, and Zoysiagrass) and is an indication that there is consumer demand for high quality turfgrasses which are true to variety.

Pesticide Use in Turf

The Georgia Department of Agriculture estimates that over 2,000 people have a commercial pesticide applicator license in Category 24 – Turf and Ornamentals. This is the largest group of commercial pesticide applicator license holders in Georgia. The University of Georgia College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences faculty hold numerous trainings each year for this group. License holders receive information on topics such as pesticide disposal and storage, safety, ground and surface water protection, non-chemical methods of pest control, and etc.

The University of Georgia Turfgrass program

Research and Extension efforts are directed towards developing and dissemination environmentally and economically sound best management practices (BMPs) to maintain a sound basis for the continued growth of this dynamic industry that impacts Georgia through jobs, goods/services, property values, tourism, and the quality of life in Georgia.