

Program Spotlight

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A Visit to Farmlinks A Research and Demonstration Golf Course

The Farmlinks golf course is located on the 3,500 acre Pursell Farms near Sylacauga, Alabama. Farmlinks is billed as the world's first and only research and demonstration golf course, and Pursell Technologies, who are the makers of Polyon coated fertilizers, have formed partnerships with leading companies in the golf and turf business in order to build and operate Farmlinks.

Toro has provided all of the equipment, Club Car has provided all golf carts, and Syngenta is involved with plant protectants. The participating companies then bring customers, potential clients and distributors to Farmlinks on a regular schedule throughout the year. Two groups are brought through each week, on average, with a stay entailing two or two and a half days. A total of about 1,000 visitors are invited each year; approximately 750 of those visitors are from the golf industry.

The Experience

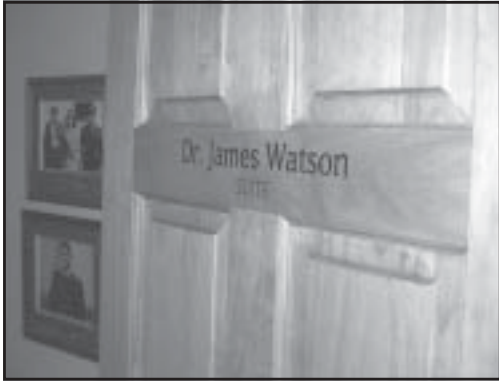
With that rather general introduction, it is probably easiest to convey a sense of the "Experience at Farmlinks," as it is called, by simply describing what I observed as I visited the facility for the first time in February 2005. I visited Farmlinks with a group from Pacific Golf Management, and we were accompanied by Toro and Simplot Partners representatives.

After meeting in Birmingham, we made the one hour drive to Pursell Farms, arriving just before lunchtime on a Wednesday morning. All visitors stay at Parker Lodge, which sits just behind the 17th green of Farmlinks Golf Club. We arrived at the impressive lodge and were greeted by Pursell Technologies staff. A fire was burning in the massive stone fireplace, and a black bear stood stuffed just to the right of the door. Other hunting trophies adorned the walls of the lodge. We were each assigned a suite in



Parker Lodge, where all visitors to Farmlinks stay, sits just behind the 17th green of Farmlinks Golf Club.





Guest suites at Parker Lodge are named after distinguished people, such as Dr. James Watson, and contain appropriate furnishings.



the lodge for our stay; Dr. James Watson has a suite named after him, with appropriate furnishings, and the other suites are named after fertilizer products or distinguished people. After that warm welcome, we took a Polyon bus to the clubhouse for lunch, and then we continued on into Sylacauga to visit the Polyon factory.

At the factory, we met with the director of product testing and quality control in his laboratory. He explained to us how Polyon products are tested to ensure integrity, and the polymer application process was demonstrated in a laboratory-sized mixing drum. Then we went next door to a well-appointed theatre, where popcorn, candy and drinks are provided before one is instructed to sit down and listen to Dr. Jeff Higgins explain the various types of nitrogen fertilizer and their associated release characteristics.

This was probably the most educational aspect of the trip, as Dr. Higgins went through each class of nitrogen fertilizers, which he defined as fast release, slow release and controlled release. In fact, the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) offers continuing education credits for this session. He further subdivided the primary classes of nitrogen fertilizers, and I will spare the details here; suffice it to say, however, that this thor-



A Pursell Technologies staff member demonstrates the polymer application process at the Polyon factory.

ough discussion of nitrogen products touched on all the commercially available forms of nitrogen fertilizer. The audience was taught, or reminded, about the release mechanisms of different nitrogen fertilizers. At the end of the two and a half hour presentation, curtains were opened at the front and side of the theater and a factory floor was revealed through glass windows. Below was Polyon fertilizer production, amidst mixing cylinders, conveyer belts and screens.

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Above: A practice green at the Hurdzan-Fry designed Farmlinks Golf Club at Pursell Farms in Sylacauga, Alabama. Below: A collage of images of Farmlinks Golf Club. The tees, roughs and fairways feature a variety of grass and soil types. The beautiful facility is billed as the world's first and only research and demonstration golf course.

After this informative presentation, we returned to Parker Lodge, where the fire was bigger and we were soon seated in the dining area for a freshly cooked meal of steaks and other tasty food. A continuing refrain of our hosts at Farmlinks was that we should enjoy ourselves, and the food seemed especially prepared to satisfy the appetites of hungry golf course superintendents. When dinner was complete, we retired to the ground floor of Parker Lodge, where—if my experiences are any indication—one is allowed to lose at billiards, ping pong and Playstation, all in the same evening.

Day Two

The next day began with a traditional Southern breakfast of bacon, eggs, grits, and biscuits and gravy. A representative from Toro then made a presentation, first in the conference room at the lodge, where he explained Toro's role at Farmlinks and the methodology that Toro uses when developing innovative products. Pictures were shown of some prototype equipment and technologies, and we then went to the turf nursery to operate and observe some prototype equipment for ourselves.

That was the end of the formal program at Farmlinks, and after a catfish lunch, half of our party went fishing, and the rest of us played golf at the Hurdzan-Fry-designed Farmlinks

Golf Club. The course is notable for the various grass types planted there. Most tees, rough and fairways are Tifsport Bermuda grass. Greens are A-1/A-4 bentgrass mix, although the practice green also has L-93 and G-2 in some sections and that practice green is also divided into three sections, each with different rootzone mixes. One section is sand-peat, one is straight sand, and the other is sand-Profile. The greens on the

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I want you to know that we at Cornell recognize and greatly appreciate the valuable contributions your industry and turf managers make to the citizens of New York as environmental stewards. In addition to being knowledgeable and conscientious about integrated pest management, your industry provides recreational opportunities, preserves open green space, provides wildlife habitats, and prevents soil erosion. We applaud those efforts.

course are all 85%-15% sand-Profile. A chipping green has Champion Bermuda in one section, Tifdwarf in another, and TifEagle in another. Four of the fairways are planted to Zorro zoysia. One par 3 fairway is Sea Isle paspalum. One fairway is Tifway 419, and the hybrid bluegrass called "Thermal blue" is planted in the rough of one hole. The par three tees were overseeded with ryegrass, and the fourth fairway was overseeded with ryegrass; one end of that fairway included trials of different overseeding practices.

A Remarkable Place

We spent one more night and played golf again the following morning. For turfgrass managers, Pursell Farms and Farmlinks Golf Club really are a 3,500 acre recreation and education facility, as advertised on their website. Farmlinks is a remarkable place and the products of the sponsoring companies are not oversold, although one is certainly aware of what companies have made this experience possible. I would encourage anyone who has the opportunity to visit there to do so. Farmlinks is almost an amusement park for golf course superintendents. The combination of sport, turfgrass education, product demonstrations, and Southern hospitality is hard to beat.

Micah Woods

Dean Henry

I also wish to use this opportunity to convey the opinions that are more generally held by myself and the rest of the Cornell turfgrass team.

I want you to know that we at Cornell recognize and greatly appreciate the valuable contributions your industry and turf managers make to the citizens of New York as environmental stewards. In addition to being knowledgeable and conscientious about integrated pest management, your industry provides recreational opportunities, preserves open green space, provides wildlife habitats, and prevents soil erosion. Members of your industry cooperate with Soil and Water Conservation districts, Audubon International, the Department of Environmental Conservation, and many other organizations, and we applaud those efforts.

I would also like to express my sincere appreciation for the close working relationship between Cornell and the turfgrass industry. Your support of our extension and research programs is vital to the program's success and one of the most valued partnerships in the college.

In closing, let me reiterate my commitment to the College's future relationship with the turfgrass industry. We will continue to support

turf managers as environmental stewards with research, education and extension. We will help your members educate the public on the value of the turf industry to the environment and the economy of New York. These shared values with Cornell's Land Grant mission are vital to both of us and another reason why this current situation is so difficult.

I trust we can weather the current strain in the relationship between Cornell's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and members of the turfgrass industry produced by this unfortunate incident so we can move forward with the same positive momentum we have all worked so hard to build and sustain in the past. We look forward to solving current difficulties so we can continue to grow together.

Please contact my office with ideas as to when we might meet and who should be involved.

Sincerely,

Susan A. Henry, Ph.D.
The Ronald P. Lynch Dean
College of Agriculture and Life Sciences