

Dean Henry's Response to Cornell Guidelines Language

Editor's note: The following letter is from Susan A. Henry, Ph.D., the Ronald P. Lynch Dean of Cornell's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences to Mr. James Diermeier, CGM/CNP, President of New York State Turfgrass Association, Inc. Dean Henry was responding to the publication of erroneous information in an official Cornell publication. It was written in July 2005.

Dear Mr. Diermeier:

Thank you for your letter of May 25 outlining the turfgrass industry's issues with the most recent edition of *Cornell's 2005 Pest Management Guidelines for Commercial Turfgrass*.

As Dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, I want you to know I share your frustration, and, indeed, anger regarding the inappropriateness of the language contained on pages 21-25. I am embarrassed that such egregious opinions were published and distributed in a publication from Cornell.

As was explained to me, approximately 50 pages of new information were added to the turfgrass guidelines this year. Some of this information originated in a series of articles published seven years ago in a turfgrass trade journal. With the best of intentions, the Cornell turfgrass team felt that this information would be helpful to the professional turfgrass managers who use the guidelines. It was unfortunate and inexcusable that they did not proof the information more carefully nor remove the offensive language in the section on fungicide use before publication.

To address the issue, let me assure you we are taking appropriate steps to rectify the situation and to make sure this type of mistake does not happen again. Here are the actions that I and others have undertaken:

- I am conducting a personal investigation to determine how this language came to be published in the publication and who is responsible, and am taking appropriate actions to ensure this type of error does not occur again. Furthermore, I have spoken personally to the individuals responsible to ensure that they do not promulgate such opinions in the future nor allow such opinions to affect work associated with Cornell. I am taking administrative action commensurate

with Cornell rules to hold these individuals responsible.

- Let me assure you that Frank Rossi, who is the leader of Cornell's turfgrass team, was not responsible for the situation. He feels even worse than I do and is working with me to ensure that this will never happen again. Immediately after the incident occurred, but prior to my being informed, Frank spoke directly with many individuals in the turfgrass and related industries who brought these concerns forward. He also published an acknowledgment of the concerns and a retraction in Cornell's *ShortCUTT* newsletter on May 23, 2005, which went to all NYSTA members and additional subscribers in the turfgrass industry.

- The online version of the guidelines was edited, and the inappropriate language removed as soon as the concerns were raised.

- The remaining copies of the 2005 turfgrass guidelines have been pulled from distribution. People interested in procuring them are being directed to the online version.

- Frank Rossi is preparing a letter to all members of the turfgrass industry who received a copy of the guidelines that addresses the mistake. He will offer his expertise and the expertise of our director of communications, Linda McCandless, should someone be contacted by the media or an advocacy group.

- Frank Rossi and the Cornell turfgrass team have developed a more rigorous editorial process to insure this type of mistake will not be repeated in the turfgrass guidelines.

- The editorial process by which the entire Cornell guideline series is produced is undergoing a review to prevent this type of error in the future. I will insist that a single editor be identified for each guideline who will take responsibility for content.

I would also like to extend my personal apology to you and members of your industry for the negative perceptions of the industry that were promulgated in this publication, for which we accept full responsibility. Furthermore, I am offering to personally meet with you and members of your industry to address the concerns you voiced in your letter.

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As Dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, I want you to know I share your frustration, and, indeed, anger regarding the inappropriateness of the language contained on pages 21-25. I am embarrassed that such egregious opinions were published and distributed in a publication from Cornell.

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.

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.

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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

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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*