

*Producers' Meetings, continued*

Sod Solutions and producers, have produced some remarkable results over the last two years, we will create new joint marketing opportunities. Sod Solutions will sponsor a schedule of regional symposia-type meetings designed to bring producers together with new customer prospects and others who can impact demand for the turfgrasses: extension agents, landscape architects, media professionals, and others. We will soon send you more information about the symposia dates and other details; to include the involvement needed from you that will make these events successful for all of us.



**Above** - Producers and guests at the Producers' Meeting in Bay City, TX.

The following licensed producers have worked with Sod Solutions for seven years, as of 2002, and were recognized at the Producers' Meetings:

Bayside Sod  
 Carolina Turf Farms  
 Craft Turf Farms  
 Grene Acres Sod Farm & Nursery  
 Haber Sod Farms  
 King Ranch  
 Ravenswood Plantation  
 Riebeling Farms  
 Simpson Sod  
 Southern Sod  
 Thomas Brothers Grass  
 Triangle Turf Company  
 Turf Grass Farms  
 West Coast Turf  
 Wharton Turf-Grass

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 SOLUTIONS

Find Out More About Sod Gro<sup>TM</sup>,  
 The Fertilizer Recommended for  
 Sod Solutions Varieties  
[www.sodsolutions.com](http://www.sodsolutions.com)

# The Fish Wrap

Sod Solutions, Inc.  
 P.O. Box 460  
 Mt. Pleasant, SC 29465

Phone  
 843.849.1288

Fax  
 843.849.1415

Web Sites  
[www.sodsolutions.com](http://www.sodsolutions.com)  
[www.sodgro.com](http://www.sodgro.com)

E-mail  
[info@sodsolutions.com](mailto:info@sodsolutions.com)

**At Right**  
 With spring approaching,  
 or already here, consider  
 these production  
 strategies.

## Turfgrass Program Update Established Brands, Newer Releases Are On The Upswing

### Spring Readiness

By Joel Lane - Field Representative

For many areas, spring has arrived. As production fields come out of dormancy, it is

appropriate to plan how to prepare them for the upcoming growing season. Remember, a key method of

encouraging quick spring green-up is to bring your mowing heights down to levels that may be tighter than what is normal during the peak growing season. For EMPIRE Zoysia, good heights going into spring are around 1-1.5"; however, you can lower them to 0.5." The same information is also true for EMPRESS Zoysia. If green-up has already occurred with zoysias and you wish to lower your heights, you should do this over several mowings to prevent slow scalping recovery.

Celebration should be mowed to around 0.5-1" in the spring, while Palmetto St. Augustine will fire out of dormancy more quickly when mowed to heights of 1.5-2."

Fertilizing these varieties with a well-balanced fertilizer will also help jumpstart growth in the spring. Slow-release products, like SOD GRO<sup>TM</sup> Sod Starter *Enhanced* with MicroNutrients, are good options if threats of late-season frosts still exist.

Zoysia growers, watch for billbugs in the spring, and treat accordingly if necessary. Refer to the pertinent Sod Solutions Tech Bulletin for details; or, call our office if you need a copy.

All varieties: since similar climatic conditions can exist in both fall and spring, monitor areas this spring that were disease hot spots last fall.

The January Producers' Meetings included a program status report for each variety. (*More about the Producers Meetings on page 3*). We were pleased to report that key indicators for 2002 and early 2003 reflect growing demand for Palmetto and EMPIRE, as well as to an enthusiastic reception for Celebration. Here is a recap of program updates for each variety:

**Palmetto St. Augustine:** Since 1995, U.S. acres in production have grown from 1,000+ acres to nearly 6,000. Market share is growing in mature markets, as production meets demand. Palmetto has become a recognized industry "standard." Technical performance is sound, with no new issues reported. We will promote Palmetto in mature markets; and we will optimize production efficiencies and marketing for developing markets.

**EMPIRE Zoysia:** U.S. production acreage total is more than 1400 acres, up from about 200 in 1999. Technical performance is rated outstanding, based in part upon field trials and marked brown patch resistance. Production and demand trends currently seem to balance. Sod Solutions is working to overcome typical "new product" market resistance and to generate demand with specific marketing. We will continue to document technical performance and to increase production in under-supplied markets.

**EMPRESS Zoysia:** U.S. production acres are between 150-200. Licensing is closed. Production is being reduced in colder zones, to diminish future spring green-up concerns. There are solid sales in specific regions. We expect slower/controlled growth and steady, but not major, market share.

**Celebration Bermudagrass:** 2001-2002 U.S. production blossomed from 50 acres to nearly 450. Celebration is creating a lot of "buzz," from favorable comparisons to 419, to unsolicited comments on color, growth habits and durability. Licensing in several states is closed. Growth of this grass may be exponential this year. We will continue to monitor technical performance and to balance marketing and supply.

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## The Year Ahead

### Marketing, New Products Will Drive Progress

Several producers have asked for an opinion on the outlook for the turf industry this year, as well as for suggestions on preparing for emerging market conditions.

The war with Iraq and economic factors will greatly affect the mood of the country and its consumption of goods. Related factors, including war circumstances, duration, and success, historically impact spending throughout the U.S. Other influential factors are housing starts, interest rates, and energy costs. Currently, housing starts are rising, and interest rates are at historic lows, which is positive. However, fuel costs are high, and if not reduced, may trigger inflation.

Historically, green goods, including turf, usually perform well during war. During times of uncertainty, people like to work outside to improve their surroundings. Possibly, consumers are also heading outdoors to escape the bombardment of war news, and to enjoy good weather after a wet, cold winter.

Overall confidence in the market is good, particularly in the south and southwest. Most producers are having an active spring in the deep South with prices steady, or even increasing. (Yes, *increasing!*) Recent weather in most regions has been wet and cold, resulting in below average production rates. Springtime shortages have been reported in some areas for several Sod Solutions varieties, which bodes well for licensed producers for summer and fall.

#### Recommendations:

- **Stay positive.** Product discriminators like Palmetto, EMPIRE, and Celebration are in demand, and are recognized as superior selections. Also, be confident that we are dedicated to promoting the brands.
- **Stay in touch with your customers.** Continue to build your customer relationships; and, please continue to tell us about customer comments and local market trends.

- **Use the marketing materials that we have developed.**
- **Use the new SOD GRO™ fertilizer to create additional sales.** SOD GRO™ gives your customers a product that improves the grasses' potential performance (both new installations and established lawns). SOD GRO™ also gives you another avenue to reinforce customer relations. Plus, the bag advertises the turfgrasses' brand names.

Thank you for your confidence and business.

#### New Chemicals

The following are new chemical products that are available, or will soon be available, on the market:

##### Herbicides

- Quicksilver (FMC)
  - Fast acting broadleaf control for:
    - > St. Augustinegrass
    - > Zoysiagrass
    - > Common Bermudagrass and possibly hybrids
- Momentum (Syngenta) - Sept. 2003 registration date
  - Addresses young grassy weeds (dallis, crab, etc.), torpedograss, sedges, kyllinga, etc. in:
    - > Bermudagrass
    - > Zoysiagrass
    - > St. Augustinegrass (possible)

##### Insecticides

- Meridian (Syngenta) - March-April 2003 registration date
  - Systemic soil insecticide (grubs, mole crickets, etc.) for:
    - > St. Augustinegrass
    - > Zoysiagrass
    - > Bermudagrass

##### Fungicides

- Triton (Bayer)
  - Brown patch, dollar spot, etc. for:
    - > Most varieties
- Insignia (BASF) - May 2003 registration date
  - Broad-spectrum strobilurin: very good on pythium, dollar spot for:
    - > All warm season varieties
- Emerald (BASF) - March 2003 registration date
  - Control of dollar spot, including resistant strains
    - > St. Augustinegrass



Tobey Wagner  
President

## Tobey Talk



Sis Reda  
Director of Marketing

## Market Rap

### 2003 Marketing Charted at Sixth Annual Producers' Meetings Brand Focus, Collaboration Key to Win-Win Results

If it's Tuesday, we must be in Texas... That's how it felt in January, when we held two producers' meetings in one week. In the past, Sod Solutions has scheduled an annual producers' meeting every year; but, this year, in an effort to present more regionalized information and to make attendance more convenient, we offered two meetings. We met with licensed producers from western areas of the U.S. in Bay City, TX on January 28, and with "eastern" producers in Orlando, FL on January 30. About 110 producers, guests, and industry professionals attended the meetings.

Each meeting included program updates for Palmetto, EMPIRE, EMPRESS, and Celebration; review of 2002 marketing; preview of 2003 marketing strategies; technical information; and an update on new chemicals. We also discussed SOD GRO™ fertilizer, which is being offered to licensed producers as an opportunity to create new revenue through sales of a balanced fertilizer product ideal for our varieties.

Fifteen producers were recognized for their tenure as Sod Solutions partners. They have been licensed for seven years (see list on page 4). These producers have supported our company for a long time, and we would not be where we are today without them!

We outlined upcoming marketing support for the brands that is planned to generate additional demand. 2003 activity will include national and regional print advertising, radio ads, expansion/enhancement of the Sod Solutions Web site, trade show support, public relations, and more. Since it has been demonstrated that collaborative efforts between producers, and between

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#### Marketing Highlights For March - June 2003

##### March

- 7 ads in Turf Industry Publications
- Special Event Support with Geisler Brothers- Little Rock, AR
- Landscape Contractors Meeting with Nimmer Turf & Trees - Bluffton, SC
- SOD GRO™ supporting Web site, www.sodgro.com, launched
- "Better Lawns" Radio Ads - FL
- "Better Lawns" Radio Interview - FL
- SOD GRO™ Product Release

##### April

- 7 ads in Turf Industry Publications
- New Print Ad Creative for EMPIRE, Palmetto Completed / Available to Producers
- "Better Lawns" Radio Ads - FL
- Update EMPRESS Zoysia Brochure
- Sod Solutions Web site expanded and enhanced to provide additional marketing information, updates

##### May

- 6 ads in Turf Industry Publications
- "Better Lawns" Radio Ads - FL
- News Release - Celebration Update - All States
- Producers Symposia for Central Florida - Date To Be Announced
- Update EMPIRE Zoysia brochure

##### June

- 6 ads in Turf Industry Publications
- Producers Symposia - Dates, Locations To Be Announced
- Bethel Farms Field Day - Arcadia, FL
- New Celebration Print Ad Creative Completed / Available to Producers
- News Release - EMPIRE Update - All States
- News Release - Florida Symposia Report