

Turf Producers International (TPI) 2014 Midwinter Study Tour

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Turf Australia

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May 2014
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TU13706 - Turf Producers International (TPI) 2014 Midwinter Study Tour

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Project Purpose

Turf Australia and the Turf Industry Strategic Investment Plan recognises that many new ideas and concepts for turf production and business practices can originate from overseas. The organisation 'Turf Producers International' (TPI) organise Midwinter and Midsummer conferences every year and they can include educational seminars, site visits and field days. Participants to previous TPI events have said the information gained from attending was very beneficial.

This project provided the opportunity for Australian growers, regardless of business size, to attend the 2014 TPI Midwinter educational conference and field day in an organised and economical way. As a group, growers were able to interact with each other and relay what they learnt back to the Australian industry and their own turf businesses.

Acknowledgements

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Media Summary

Australian Turf Producers Welcomed with Open Arms

More than 70 Australians from the turf industry recently travelled to America and were welcomed with open arms by Turf Producers International (TPI) at their Midwinter 2014 International Educational Conference & Field Day, in Orlando, Florida. The four day event had 25 speakers presenting 16 separate sessions covering 11 different topics.

With almost 700 delegates in total at the International Education Conference & Field Day, 10% were Australians. To acknowledge the largest Australian contingent ever to travel to a TPI event in North America, TPI put together an official audio visual welcome to the soundtrack of 'I still call Australia home'.

Some of the Australians who attended went on a pre-conference tour which included parts of Texas, Georgia and Florida before arriving at the TPI Midwinter conference and Field Day in Orlando. Others stayed on after the conference ended and participated in a Zoysia grass maintenance information session and then travelled to the University of Florida at Gainesville, Florida to review R&D and extension activities.

We are facing the same issues worldwide

Many of the issues we face in the turf industry here in Australia are similar to those faced by turf growers worldwide. For example; the need for more water efficient turf grass varieties, knowing your actual costs of turf production, promoting to the community the substantial benefits from turf, attracting and maintaining reliable staff and opportunities for diversification and value adding were just some of the topics covered at the TPI International Education Conference & Field Day.

Some of the most interesting and relevant issues for the Australian turf industry included: Best Management Practices in relation to turf production, installation and maintenance; Traits of being successful; Lawn research; Reliability of staff; The cost of doing business in the turf industry; The increased popularity of Zoysia, and; The national turfgrass testing program.

The benefits from international networking with the best turf producers from around the world cannot be underestimated. New ideas, gaining reliable and relevant information, identifying opportunities for collaboration and feeling part of a dynamic and professional industry are just some of the benefits to be gained from networking internationally.

Outcomes and how they were achieved

The Turf Producers International (TPI) Midwinter Conference & Field Day held in Orlando, Florida attracted almost 700 delegates, including 73 Australians. This was the highest number of Australian delegates ever at a TPI event in North America.

The reason for the large number of delegates is for the first time, TPI held an educational conference in conjunction with a field day and the event was held in a warm season grass growing area of America. As the Australian turf market is dominated by warm season grasses, this particular TPI event was highly relevant to us.

Some of the Australians who attended went on a pre-conference tour which included parts of Texas, Georgia and Florida before arriving at the TPI Midwinter conference and Field Day in Orlando. Others stayed on after the conference ended and participated in a Zoysia grass maintenance information session and then travelled to the University of Florida at Gainesville, Florida to review R&D and extension activities.

This HAL funded study tour contributed funding support to 18 representatives from the Australian Turf Industry.

A Snapshot from Florida

Florida has some interesting facts and figures which impact on the local Turf Industry. For example, Florida has partly sandy soils which do not hold a lot of water. However, 1,000 people per day are moving to Florida and 10,000 people per week are retiring there.

Local governments in Florida are concerned about the perceived effect fertilizers are having on the environment and, as a result, there are laws restricting the sale, use and application of phosphorous and nitrogen in fertilizers. As a result, all landscapers are required to undergo a Best Management Practice (BMP) training in order to apply fertilizer, control pests, manage irrigation and select plants.

Since the Global Financial Crisis, over 100 golf courses have closed in Florida. However, the economy is now turning and golf courses are being reopened.



A suburban Orlando Zoysia home lawn is shown on the left, St Augustine (known as Soft Leaf Buffalo in Australia) on the right.

Seven traits of being successful

Nancy Friedman, the '*Telephone Doctor*', opened the conference with a lively presentation on the 'seven traits of being successful'. Nancy explained how successful people:

- Choose their attitude in advance – and make it positive!
- Visualise success – albeit 'realistic' success
- Have energy, humour and enthusiasm
- Resist negative tendencies
- Are a 'double checker'
- Accept change
- Are grateful for what they have.

The Lawn Institute Research Advisors

The lawn Institute is an organisation set up to provide scientific information, education and awareness of the environmental benefits of turf. The Lawn Institute research advisors claim that turfgrass is the plant that many urban people know, touch and understand the most. It can be their most significant link with nature and it directly connects communities to landscapes.

Turfgrass gives many direct beneficial services back to communities and it is much more than just aesthetics. Providing a significant cooling effect, erosion control, absorbing carbon dioxide, producing oxygen, reducing runoff, decreasing fire risks, increasing property values as well as improving physical and mental wellbeing are all significant benefits from turfgrass that needs to be better understood by law makers and the general community.

In recent years, constant advances in breeding varieties have resulted in significantly more water use efficient turfgrass varieties with up to 50% less irrigation water being required and/or up to 4 weeks difference in 'dry down' time.

However, for turfgrass to provide these community benefits to their full capacity, lawns must be properly maintained and be healthy. Unfortunately, over 20 American States have completely banned the use of pesticides on all school grounds. This has resulted in a significant decline in the surface quality of many sporting fields and outdoor play areas and a corresponding increase in surface related injuries has occurred.



The Trade Exhibition Hall at the TPI Educational Conference

Eagle Lake Turf Farm, Alberta, Canada

A feature of this year's TPI Midwinter 2014 International Education Conference and Field Day was several 'show and tell' presentations from successful turf businesses from around the world, including Australia.

Eric Heuver from Eagle Lake Turf Farms in Alberta Canada gave a practical description of his challenges and opportunities in operating a 1200 acre (485 Ha) Turf Farm. Eric said his biggest limitation is reliable people, especially truck drivers. He has diversified into providing garden soil via the 'Big Yellow Bag' franchise and offering the 'Green Roof' modular system.

The core purpose of Eagle Lake Turf Farms is to 'Create quality of life outdoors' and core values are: People and family first; Innovation; Do the right thing; Be competitive; and, Hardworking.



Diversification in your business panel, Rob Davey from Australia presenting.

The cost of doing business

Ben Copeland, Junior and Senior, from SuperSod & Patten Seed Company explained the importance of understanding the real and ever changing costs of turf production.

"As we are not producing Widgets, our costs of production are constantly changing with the influence of weather and variable costs such as fuel and fertilizer" claimed Ben Copeland Senior. "As a result, we hired a Chief Financial Officer (CFO) so we can get daily financial information."

The CFO set up 17 different sets of books to cover the various different aspects and enterprises in SuperSod & Patten Seed Company. Each of the farm managers upload their costs immediately via an iPad.

This information provides several key "dashboard" or 'KPI' indicators, such as revenue, labour, chemical and/or fertilizer per acre or gross profit per variety or paddock. Dashboard indicators give you the opportunity to 'REACT' – Research, Evaluate, Act, Change & Train.

Increased popularity of Zoysia

The popularity of *Zoysia sp* in the southern States of America, particularly Florida, is increasing. It is being promoted as more water efficient than the popular St Augustine varieties (known as Soft Leaf Buffalo here in Australia), however, it requires different management.

For example, *Zoysia* should be mowed at about 3 to 4cm high while, in Florida, St Augustine is usually mowed at 6 to 8cm high. As *Zoysia* takes longer to get established, it must be laid tight to hide the sod lines and the use of a roller is recommended. Spreading slow release fertilizer just prior to laying is also recommended and nutrition needs to be carefully managed once established as excess nitrogen can cause problems.

America has between 40 and 50 turf research and education facilities, mostly universities, and there are approximately 150 education only facilities that cover turf, commonly known as colleges.

National turfgrass testing program

The University of Florida has over 16 hectares devoted to turf research and it is part of the national turfgrass testing program. The national turfgrass testing program enables companies, individuals and industry to submit new turf lines for trials across several testing sites throughout the country. The trial period is 5 years.

Per entry, it costs \$5000 to enter the trial and \$1000 per year. If a turf line is commercially released during the trial, a \$10,000 royalty payment is required. The current national turfgrass testing program has 33 entries in total, with 19 of those originating from Florida.

The University of Florida is currently trialling a dwarf Bahia Grass which is dark green in colour and has a finer texture than most Bahia Grasses. The opportunity to develop this into a mainstream turf variety is significant as Bahia Grass has a low nutrient requirements, is drought tolerant and requires less mowing.

Interestingly, Kikuyu is a declared noxious weed in most USA States.



Part of the national turfcraft testing program at the University of Florida, Gainesville.

Discussion

Study tour participants have provided the following points of discussion.

Anne Muscat – Active Turf:

The thing that stood out the very most for me was the size of the farms that they have there in the USA. A small farm is considered to be about 300 acres.

The farm that the field day was held on was a farm in Arcacia, Florida. The turf varieties that were grown on the farm included Empire, Celebration, Palmetto and Sapphire. They had a large amount of machinery on display. Some of the well known turf machines on display included Trebro, Kesmac, Brouwer, Firefly and Magnum. I was particularly interested in the new turf Harvester on the market called Firefly.

The Firefly weighed less than the other machines which are something that we would need on my own farm as we have clay soil type, not sandy. It also has a predominately electric operating systems, not hydraulic. The advantage of this as I was told is that it would be better on sloping ground which we also have on our farm as Freemans Reach. At the moment the Firefly is only made to be cut in slabs but they think in the next year they will have a machine designed to be cutting in rolls which we prefer to have.



Craig Banbury – Glenview:

The research being done at the Universities and Blade Runner Farms, using embryo recovery to breed other species of lawn with better traits, such as reduced water use, less fertilizer input and other studies of chemical use is very relevant to us.

The TPI Field Day was good, seeing all the machinery that normally you read about in magazines, in particular the design of the new turf harvester, Firefly (a simple yet smart design).

Simple phrases, as demonstrated by the 'Phone Doctor' presentation, highlighted the importance of enhancing the understanding of messages and ensuring they don't take on a different meaning.

The case study presentation by Eric Heauver (Eagle Lake Turf Farms) and Ed (Emerald View Turf Farm) about their history of farming and the challenges they have faced was enlightening, as was the talk about the Cost of Doing Business from SuperSod & the Patten Seed Company.



Geoff Foreman – Australian Lawn Concepts

It's extremely hard to pick on just a few subjects from this tour, it was mind blowing the sheer size of the operations that we viewed, the knowledge and dedication of the people we met. I thought I had a pretty good understanding of the industry but now realise how little I know. Even to be with the other Australian growers, the knowledge that they have and are so willing to share is very humbling, these are some of the best growers in the country and I feel very privileged to have been with them.

The director of the AAC golf course spoke about how successful the variety Zeon was, explaining how as a trial they relayed some of the public fairway with Zeon and found it so good that the professional players would rather practice on the public course than the PGA championship course. Therefore, they had to relay the professional course with Zeon as they couldn't have the public course better than the championship course.

Jill Berry – Sir Walter Buffalo

Firstly may I say how much I enjoyed the TPI conference & field day. I found the information sessions at the conference outstanding in both content and in their organisation. In particular I was quite astounded that whilst they are leaps and bounds ahead of Australia with regards to research and development, they are along way behind Australia when it comes to marketing turf as the best alternative for ground cover in home lawns. In the session regarding Turf Sustainability, their message to turf producers on how to market turf to the consumer was just scratching the surface of the Brand Story realised in Australia some 6 or 7 years ago.



Joe Rogers - TurfCo

For me, the entire trip was packed with activities and experiences which stood out to me and grabbed my attention. I was able to learn a great deal from these and gain a further understanding in which direction our industry is heading. Being young and relatively new to working full time in the turf industry, it was great to see how the same industry can be so vastly different on the other side of the world. The main aspects of the trip which stood out for me were:

- *First and foremost the amount of time, money and man power the US turf industry is putting into researching and developing new breeds of turf grasses, in particular Zoysia grasses. Our visits to Bladerunner farms with David Doguet and Texas ATM University farms showed all of us how committed the US turf industry is to the breeding and development of new turf grasses. The findings over the past decade or so have been significant, and are going along way to discovering the new 'wonder grass', which could potentially have a massive impact on the Australian turf industry in the near future.*
- *The commitment from US turf farmers to the industry was also a standout for me. Highlighted by the massive turn-out to both the conference and the field day by farmers from all over North America (and even parts of Europe), this demonstrated how willing the US turf businesses, both large and small, are in ensuring a successful future for their industry. This was shown by the participation and interest in the seminars on sales, marketing and agronomy I attended at the conference. The information attained was invaluable to both the US and our Australian turf industry.*



Kim Tranter – Lawn Lovers

I was really impressed with the amount of research being conducted in the United States. I was surprised at the level of marketing and feel that both sides have a lot to offer each other. I loved the setup of the breakout rooms and found all the information relevant. We also had the opportunity to visit a few farms before the conference and that was really interesting. I really

enjoyed the welcome speech by Melanie Stanton – I found her very interesting. I loved visiting the farm for the field day and learning about the new machinery available.

Michael Muscat – Greenlife Turf

The main aspects of the trip which stood out for me were:

- *The severity winter cold and the state of dormancy on the warm season turf varieties.*
- *The number of golf courses in the USA.*
- *The time and money that is invested into developing new turf varieties on farm trials and in universities.*
- *The unbelievable roads and freeways/bridges, network is amazing and a sight to see.*
- *In some of the states visited, particularly Texas, still showing signs of the economic down turn from the GFC, especially down towards San Antonio.*
- *The visit to the AT&T Stadium in Dallas was amazing.*

Nathan Layt – Oz Breed

The major stand out items from the tour for me are:

- *The size of the industry. The market in Florida alone is larger than that of our entire country. We can learn a lot from the industry in the USA though need to scale it back and realise some methods used there are not viable on a smaller scale here.*
- *Another thing that stood out to me was the breeding trials. After seeing what they are developing it gave me confidence that we in Australia have some outstanding breeds and material released or in the development stage.*
- *In general, Americans manufacture a lot of the equipment tractors, etc, used on the farms it would be good to grow and support our local manufacturing better than we currently do.*



Thomas Mifsud - Canturf

The things that stood out to me were:

- *The amount of turf growers that were represented at the TPI conference.*
- *The opportunity to meet and talk with turf growers from different parts of the world.*
- *The Range of new Machinery being used and displayed at bethel farms.*
- *The opportunity to meet and connect directly with different manufactures and seed producers/suppliers.*



Steve Vella – Aview Turf

The tour interested me from the start. I have always questioned what more can we learn from an industry that works on a larger scale, such as America - known for its large machinery and acres of open flat land than runs for miles. Who would I meet and what can I learn from attending a conference in Florida?

As we had flown in looking over the country was amazing to see the amount of fresh water dams in Orlando, this had really taken me by surprise as it was defiantly not something I had expected to see. The weather was warmer than I had thought, this had me think how well warmer season lawns will grow in America.

The set up for the meetings were well organised and assured that all could hear each speaker and time allowed between each conference to meet and get to know the other attendees. I met growers, turf breeders and machine manufactures which was interesting to hear and understand how they operate and run their businesses.

The Turf Industry in America is on such a large scale and is Big Business to all involved. I spoke to Tobey Wagner and his team, learning the endless efforts and trials involved to create the perfect lawn varieties to suite an extremely variable climate over a large part of America.

On the opening night, it was interesting to hear the different experiences and knowledge brought by those who have been on past Conferences. There were growers from Canada, England and the USA who I had met and speaking with them found out how much we had in common and great connections were made.

Over the next few days the guest speakers shared their experiences and knowledge. I was able to engage and ask questions on many topics. It was both informative and enjoyable as we

discussed topics both serious and not so serious that had us all laughing and interacting in a relaxed atmosphere.

Considering the large scales the Turf farmers in America work it was quite surprising to see that many have a second line of work as they are unable to survive on turf alone. This was an eye opener as I believed the Turf farmers from America had large turnovers and ran a high profit margin.

The Field day at Bethel Farms showed the latest machines and demonstrated how they operate. They included turf cutters, aerators and dethatches. I really enjoyed this field day as there was so much to take in. The farm had just been taken over and they had over sowed the Empire Zoysia with the Rye to get a richer winter colour and help with the harvesting.

Simon Adermann – Lawn Solutions Australia

The items that stood out for me were the presentations received at Texas A&M and Georgia State Universities on their turf plant breeding program and the potential to access some very much improved turf varieties for the Australia market.

Also, Bladerunner Farm in Poteet Texas; Bladerunner Farms is the world's largest privately owned Zoysia Grass and Buffalo grass research and development facility. David Doguet and his family run this business. Bladerunner Farms develops grasses that are licensed to quality turf farms all over the world. The grasses developed by Bladerunner Farms are some of the most advanced, environmentally friendly, drought tolerant available on the market today for use on home lawns, golf courses and sports fields.

We were very fortunate to be invited to Atlanta Athletics Club (private 45 hole golf course and training facility) for lunch and to be addressed by Ken Magnum on the reasons the golf course changed turf varieties and how it is performing in Atlanta's climate.

The main focus at the conference was based around customer service, selling skills and traits and numerous presentations on succession planning and business restructure to fit in with the new business environment.

The TPI Field day at Bethel Farms had an excellent display of new turf harvesters working (Firefly, Trebro, Kesmac and Magnum).



Michael Denney – Harden Park

The thing that stood out for me were the speeches from Emerald View Turf Farm and Eagle Lake Turf Farm. This was a show and tell of stories about where they came from and where they are now. As turf farmers, whether we are small or large scale or in different parts of the world, we endure very similar problems, such as environmental, mechanical, logistical, water, fertiliser and staff.

It was great to see how Australian turf producers are on the right foot as we are advancing and moving forward by producing a premium product that is cost effective with excellent customer service like our international counterparts.

At the start of the afternoon session TPI gave the Australian Turf Producers a wonderful welcome with gifts and a power point presentation showing slides of the last TPI conference held in Australia with the theme song "We Call Australia Home".

It was a great opportunity to be part of the TPI 2014 International Education Conference, to be able to network with other farmers, connect with farmer and their issues as an industry. The TPI field day at Bethel Farms was a wonderful opportunity to see new farm machinery in action with up to date farm practices and have contact with trade suppliers face to face.



Brent Redman – Buchanan Turf

This was my first trip to America and it was a terrific opportunity to meet and mingle with fellow turf growers from throughout the world. Many of these growers I had conversed with by phone or email over previous years and others I met who I had previously heard of their influence in turf growing circles.



Dave Raison – Glencoe

As my first trip to the USA, it was an exciting opportunity to travel and meet with turf growers, researchers and turf professionals from throughout the world. Visits just prior to the TPI conference to a couple of turf farms, namely Bladerunner Farms and Horizon Turf Farms gave me a better understanding of some of the newer turf varieties that will soon be making their way to Australia



Robert Keating – Turf Central

One thing that was noticeable was the co-operation between the Universities and growers in working cohesively to gain information in research and development. This has undoubtedly helped the farming community take an up to date educated assessment of what are the best breeds of turf varieties they need to be planting and growing for their market. As climate changes the research and development that has been taken on by universities and private organisations have indicated the need for a breeding program that is focused on breeding superior varieties that are more drought tolerant, faster growing, less reliant on fertilisers and are more resistant to pest and diseases. The American research has indicated that the new breeds of Zoysia varieties are more prevalent and have more promising results across the board in a variety of conditions than other varieties and believe these are the varieties are the future in Turf Industry.



Lisa Keating – Turf Central

It is great to see that HAL has supported and assisted in subsidizing the Turf Industry to attend the TPI Conference in America. I am sure all of the growers who attended found it extremely beneficial to implement the knowledge and information gained on the trip to improve their farming practices.

Implications for Australian horticulture

Implications for the Australian turf industry are numerous, and include the following:

Zoysia

Zoysia is a turf variety that is currently not widespread in Australia. However, it is a very popular turf variety in the USA. It looks a little like couch but it can take more shade and is harder wearing. It also has a soft appearance and does quite well in drought conditions. While it has lower maintenance requirements in terms of mowing, it does have different establishment and nutrition requirements compared to other varieties.

The new Zoysia warm season grasses are showing promise on golf courses and for home lawns, particularly the variety Zeon which is among others going through Australian quarantine at the moment.



Bio-solids

The use of bio-solids in the USA is quite sophisticated, especially with their different grades of bio-solids. Some research suggested that unblended bio solids perform better than blended bio solids. Bio-solids can also partly address concerns about the rising cost of fertilizer.

A Bio-solid recycling facility near Armidale in NSW, found their process, as used on pasture, to be quite high in pharmaceuticals and heavy metals. The process which is used in the USA incorporates the bio-solid wastes into the soil is quite a good process, however not actually economically viable unless the county's (councils) had a rebate program or funding in place.

The idea of using bio-solids to reduce soil loss is a good one, however the routine of incorporating the matter into the soil would not work where the regrowth is from the left over rhizomes in the ground from the previous cut. It could only be used for planting a new crop or for seeding of turf which is not a common practise for much of Australia. In both Australia and USA, there needs more research into bio-solids before it is viable input for the majority of turf farms.

Turf breeding

In the areas of science breeding, there are some amazing advancements that enable the breeding of grasses that wouldn't normally grow in nature. (It's a bit like mating a horse and a donkey and taking the best parts from both animals and making a whole new breed.)

Some of the grasses in the USA have amazing shade tolerance, require less fertilizer, can handle freezing temperatures and need very little looking after. We were lead to believe that some of these grasses have already been sent to Australia and will be trialled in our climate.

The researchers that we met have given a life time to advancing these grasses. It's an exciting time for our industry and it just keeps getting better. We should be only bringing proven performing turfgrass varieties into Australia and not just a variety for the sake of it. Currently there is a very confused market in Australia with over 70 turf varieties currently available.

The study tour highlighted the differences in growing turf varieties that are not currently or commonly grown in Australia. If imported, there would need to be significant modifications in farming practices, namely pre-emergent & post emergent pesticide applications along with fertilizer treatments, that will need to be adjusted, monitored and managed.

We learnt in the areas of fertilizing, how blending insecticide with fertilizers saves time and money, and the use of root bio-stimulants to promote deep root growth making the plants give a higher return.



Turf machinery

The great advancements in machinery just keep getting bigger and better. The harvesters of today can provide the weight of each turf pallet. They also have the ability to connect directly back with the manufacturer so they can advise of required maintenance or even fix faults from the other side of the world, resulting in less down time.

A new company (Firefly) has built a new turf harvester with the latest technology and it appears to be gaining market share. It has yet to be trialled in Australia. Some of the tour participants will further investigate the purchase of a new harvester with 12 months.

Networking

Participants learnt much from the conferences and field days attended, but also gathered much information by talking to other turf farmers who were on the tour. Time was spent with several different farmers about how they run their business, particularly in their lawn conversion/ground preparation work, as that is the area I am mainly involved in.

Turf Producers International have two conferences per year, a summer conference in July/August and a winter conference in Feb/March. These conferences are always well attended from turf growers all around the world. The Orlando conference & field day were of great benefit and a number of presenters, particularly the 'show-and-tell' speakers, gave a terrific insight into the energy and drive behind their own successes.



Sales and marketing

The sales and marketing seminars at the conference demonstrated useful phone answering techniques, providing an in-depth understanding of how to deal with customers. There were great tips on engaging with the customer, to gain trust and make sales with great customer service. Gaining trust involves using a variety of techniques, such as a hand shake, eye contact and name recall.

From a marketing perspective, the study tour was enormously helpful in learning new marketing process and ways to get the message out. The USA population is almost 15 times bigger than Australia.

The main source of business for turf farms in the USA comes from the golf course market, college and major sport facilities. The homeowner consumer turf market is purchased mainly from the "Big Box" stores such as Lowes and Home Depot, and there are over 4000 of these stores around the USA.

Profitability

The cost of doing business (turf farming) all around the world have very similar issues, including best farm practices, environmental & mechanical issues. The conference presentations, especially the show and tell presentations, showed that US turf growers are facing very similar issues to Australian growers regarding return on investments with price cutting and competition.

The USA turf farms are large in comparison to Australian Turf Farms but seem to have lower prices and they rely on a large volumes to provide profit. Also, it appeared the Australian standard for Turf quality is much higher than the USA.

New technology

The un-manned mapping technology, which is basically a fixed wing model aircraft set up to fly a pre-configured route and map areas, can be overlaid onto mapping software could be put to use in Australia.

Nano technology fertiliser supposedly uses less product for better gains as the plant can take in the nutrients a lot easier. Worthwhile trialling some of these products in Australia to see what kind of benefits can be found.



A spray on product used to promote quicker establishment of grass through strong root growth, particularly when supplied to landscapers, looks promising. A problem with some of the newer turf varieties is while they have many benefits, they might not produce roots as quickly and landscapers may not look after the installation long enough to ensure its effective establishment.

The App from SuperSod was also talked about, this App is a great tool; it gives the farm manager live data updates on the inputs that are used for turf production on the farm. This enables advanced farm production and costing, the farm managers are able to determine cost per square metre of turf that is produced on a particular farm and or paddock minute by minute. This enables the farm owner/ manager to have up to date information about cost of production and implement efficient day to day production and enable the manager to alter the price according to the inputs and to set a price per crop for direct profit. Another interesting outcome from this data was farmers were sacrificing a premium turf variety to cover the cost of a budget turf variety. I think this what the Australian turf producers are guilty of, trying to get the job on price and not on profit.

Being Successful

The presentation from Nancy Friedman (the Telephone Doctor) on the seven traits to being successful are useful are well worth remembering: Attitude; Visualize success; Positivity; Resist negativity; Be a double checker; Accept change, and; Be grateful for what you have.

Turf Regrowth – Friend or Foe

There are issues in regard to turf regrowth, including:

- Things like crop rotation being helpful in the control of certain weeds that can begin to build up resistance to chemicals when the same crop is being continually re-grown the same field.
- Compacted soil from continual re-growth can cause issue with turf crops.
- When re-growing a blend of turf, the stronger blends will tend to dominate so in result the blend ratio's can change after each re-growth.



Information dissemination

Media coverage of the study tour and Australian turf growers traveling to Orlando, Florida includes page 30 of January February 2014 edition of Turf News, published by Turf Producers International, and page 19 of the Summer 2013/2014 edition of the Turf Australia Industry Magazine.

In addition, pages 26-27 of the Autumn 2014 edition of the Turf Australia Industry Magazine and pages 58 & 59 of TurfCraft International, March April edition 2014.

Additional articles have already been drafted for the next editions of: Turf News, the Turf Australia Industry Magazine, TurfCraft International and The Australian Turfgrass Management Journal.

A major presentation on the study tour is also scheduled for the 2014 Industry Conference.

Itinerary

All participants attended the TPI 2014 Midwinter Conference & Field Day in Orlando, Florida. Participants 1 to 14, inclusive, are also participating in the pre-conference tour. Participants 16 and 18 are traveling to Florida University on the Friday following the TPI Conference to investigate the Turf Research facilities at Gainesville, Florida.

Pre conference Tour

- Sun 16 February Depart Australia, various flights for Dallas, Texas
- Mon 17 February Coach trip to Texas A&M University - Stadium Tour from 12.30pm
- Tue 18 February 9am-12pm Horizon Turf Nursery then bus to San Antonio, Texas
- Wed 19 February Bus Trip to Blade Runner Farms Poteet, Texas
- Thu 20 February Depart San Antonio at 7.30am, fly to Atlanta, Georgia. Board coach and travel to Atlanta Athletic Club
- Fri 21 February University of Georgia- Griffin Campus
- Sat 22 February Coach trip through Georgia, Savannah for lunch before heading to Jacksonville, Florida
- Sun 23 February Sightseeing day - the Kennedy Space Centre, Cape Canaveral Florida and downtown Orlando F
- Mon 24 February Turf Farm Tours – Masters Turf Farm Tampa, Florida and John Deere Landscapes,
- Tue 25 February TPI Conference – Orlando Florida – accommodation at International Palms Resort Orlando, International Drive, Orlando, FL
- Wed 26 February TPI Field Day

TPI Educational Conference & Field Day

Sunday 23 February

Registration, TPI 2014 International Education Conference & Field Day - Orlando, Florida

Monday 24 February

6.45am–7.30am – Inspirational Breakfast

7.30am-2.00pm - The Lawn Institute Field Activity

9,00am-2.00pm – Recreational Tour

3.00pm-5.00pm - PR Working Group

5.00pm-6.00pm – First Timers Orientation

5.00pm-6.00pm – New Generation Leaders Networking

6.00pm-7.30pm - Welcome Reception

Tuesday 25 February

7.30am–8.45am – Conference Education Working Group

7.30am-8.45am – Past Presidents' Breakfast

8,00am-9.00am – Women's "Dutch" Breakfast

8.00am-9.00am – Continental Breakfast

9.00am-12.45pm – Education Session #1

12.45pm-2.00pm – Networking Lunch

2.00pm-4.00pm - Education Session #1 (continued)

4.30pm-6.00pm – Membership Working Group

4.30pm-6.00pm - The Lawn Institute Fundraising Committee

4.30pm-8.00pm – Exhibits & Dinner

Wednesday 26 February

8.30am–1.30pm – Field Day at Bethel Farms

1.30pm–2.30pm – Manufacturing Advisory Committee (MAC)

6.00pm-9.00pm – The Lawn Institute Banquet & Fundraiser

Thursday 27 February

8.00am–9.00am – Continental Breakfast in Exhibit Hall

9.00am-11.30am – Education session #2

11.30am-1.30pm - Exhibit Lunch

1.30pm-3.30pm - Education Session #2 (continued)

4.00pm – Disney Theme Park (optional & discounted tickets available)

Post Conference Activity

Friday 28 February

Day return trip (hire car) - depart Orlando for the Turf Research facilities at Gainesville, Florida

Saturday 1 March

Various flights returning to Australia



Recommendations

The overriding recommendation is given the significant benefits gained from international networking, study tours such as this one should be regularly supported.

Some specific recommendations are:

- Closer cooperation with TPI and the turf researchers and breeders in USA.
- Importing and trialling of more turf varieties, especially Zoysia, in Australia.
- Using the tips to being successful when dealing with customers.
- Researching the 'Land plane', as pictured below, and incorporating some Australian design features



- Investigate the registration in Australia of some of the chemicals used in USA
- Investigate further the use of bio-stimulants in Australia
- Import and trialling of harvesting equipment and other types of equipment in Australia
- Review if certain USA farming practice can be scaled down for use in Australia
- Encouraging the use of new golf course grasses here in Australia
- Following the TPI vision of being a known brand and building a unified front is definitely a good vision for the future.
- Educating the consumer to make them aware that the best benefit from turf is to have good quality turf, and to maintain it. There is a lot of miscommunication in the market place, and consumers are trying to be more environmentally responsible. So it makes sense to share the message that by using a bit of water, fertiliser, herbicide and pesticide, the benefits far outweigh any concerns.
- Educating the consumer on the large variety of turf grass varieties available from worldwide research and this ensures that they can find a 'fit for purpose' variety

- The vision of building a uniform and unified group of growers and ensuring all turf industry bodies are sending the same marketing message regarding the benefits of lawn, environmental issues, the use of chemicals and showing that turf is a serious business and the amount of research world-wide is extensive.
- There are significant opportunities for ongoing partnerships between USA and Australia in the exchange of research & development information.
- TPI are interested to learn from the Australian NxGen program in an effort to help ensure the long term viability of the turf industry.
- There is an opportunity for Australia to exchange R&D information in regard to its 'Turf Cost Calculator' and the 'Turf Queensland Accreditation Scheme'. Managed properly, this could result in significant R&D information exchange that will benefit everyone.
- Improve our profitability as well as being able to present a reputable industry to the public. The Green Accreditation program in Canada has achieved this and been well received in Canada. There are lessons to be learned for the national roll out of the Turf Queensland Accreditation Scheme in Australia.
- Promote to government both state and federal the benefits from increased funding to support the green space industry.
- Encourage the support of the whole turf production industry to support the industries peak body (Turf Australia)
- Encourage Turf Australia to hold an annual conference at a venue that will draw attendees (TPI conference was at Disney World in Orlando) members will attend and incorporate a holiday at the same time.
- Biosolids could be the way forward in Australia for seeded varieties, but at this stage it is not applicable for warm season strip harvesting.
- The work the Americans have put into new varieties coming onto the market and their reliance on less inputs is an important lesson not only for our farming practices but also for the environment.
- The new machinery and equipment likewise that will be making its way to our shores will also have enormous impacts on the efficiencies of Australian turf production.
- Incorporate the following into our turf business:
 - Better crop rotation
 - Testing and trying more sustainable fertilizing methods
 - Try new varieties of turf that will perform better in our environment
 - Not to drop turf prices under or too close to production cost just to make a sale
- The Turf Industry in Australia needs to continually lobby for R&D funds.
- Implement trial spraying techniques as used in Zoysia sp in the USA to eliminate weeds.
- The comparison of farming practices and techniques between America and Australia show they are very similar. Field and study tours enable us to keep updated.

Acknowledgments

The tour participants would like to thank Horticulture Australia Limited, the Turf Australia Board and staff and Turf Producers International (TPI).



Study Tour Delegates

The 18 study tour participants were:

1. Anne Muscat - Active Turf, Freemans Reach NSW
2. Joe Rogers – TurfCo, Jaspers Brush NSW
3. Brent Redman - Buchanan Turf, Bolwarra NSW
4. David Parker - The Lawn Doctor, Jandabup WA
5. Geoff Forman – Australian Lawn Concepts, Canungra QLD
6. Darren Miller - Millers Turf, Windsor NSW
7. Craig Banbury – Glenview, Glenview QLD
8. Michael Muscat - Greenlife Turf, Windsor NSW
9. Michael Denny - Harden Park, Edmonton QLD
10. Robert Keating - Turf Central, Mackay QLD
11. Simon Adermann – Lawn Solutions Australia, Cleveland QLD
12. Jill Berry – Sir Walter Buffalo Lawn, Woodhill NSW
13. Kim Tranter – Lawn lovers, North Nowra NSW
14. Dave Raison – Glencoe & Turf NSW, Jerrara NSW
15. Paddy Cleanhouse - Future Lawns, Winnellie NT
16. Thomas Mifsud – Canturf, Canberra ACT
17. Nathan Layt - Oz Breed, Richmond NSW
18. Steve Vella – A View Turf, Windsor NSW

