Turfgrass: A Big Business Growing Bigger in North Carolina

The Need: North Carolina’s turfgrass industry, with 2 million total acres in production — 44 percent of the state’s harvested crop acreage, more combined acreage than corn, wheat, tobacco and peanuts — ranks eighth in the United States, says the Turfgrass Council of North Carolina. The industry has a more than $4 billion economic impact on the state and provides 175,000 jobs. Because the industry is still expanding in our state, the demand for turfgrass program graduates continues to be strong. Also, proper grass selection is key to reducing energy inputs, pest activity and protecting our natural resources.

Serving the Need: N.C. State turfgrass management program graduates are experts on 12 different species of turf, including tall and fine fescue, bermuda, centipede, Kentucky bluegrass, bahia, annual and perennial rye, zoysia, St. Augustine, carpetgrass and bentgrass. Because N.C. State’s campus is in a transition climatic zone, students can grow and study both cool- and warm-season grasses.

N.C. State turfgrass professors travel to seminars across the state to educate industry leaders about new research findings or to recommend research-based solutions for insect or disease problems. The university also provides the industry with assistance and access to experts through North Carolina Cooperative Extension.

NC State’s Center for Turfgrass Environmental Research and Education (CENTERE) also sponsors a turfgrass Web site, www.turffiles.ncsu.edu, which receives more than 12 million hits annually from professionals, academicians and the public. The site features interactive programs such as "turfgrass selection," which help users determine the grass best suited for their lawns.

Impact beyond North Carolina: NC State helps the turfgrass industry thrive by providing a workforce trained in economics, business and personnel management as well as the skills and knowledge required to produce and maintain high-quality turf for golf course, residential and other applications. Turfgrass curricula are also among the most popular in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. Over the last five years, the College produced 240 graduates, 76 from our four-year programs and 164 from our two-year Agricultural Institute program.

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