USGA Turfgrass Information File

<u>1990/1991 Annual Report - Executive Summary</u>

Michigan State University Libraries

The Michigan State University (MSU) Libraries are pleased to report steady progress on three important fronts during the 1990/1991 USGA Turfgrass Information File (USGA TGIF) project year. These issues include "ease-of-use," levels of use, and the size of the database itself.

<u>Ease-of-use</u>
Based on Research Committee and subscriber feedback, 1990/1991 project efforts focused on making the software "front-end" to USGA TGIF more streamlined and "user-friendly." A revised menu system, redesigned search screens, and quicker entry and exit procedures highlighted these improvements. Changes will continue to be made to the system based on user feedback, database evolution, and software improvements. The August release of the <u>USGA TGIF Simulator Series</u> as an orientation, training, and promotional tool has provided new and potential users of the database with a low-key and realistic taste of the system without the pressure of "live" online telecommunications.

<u>Levels of use</u>
During the year, search and service requests from 42 states and five countries were processed at the Turfgrass Information Center (TIC). The new availability of the continuously-expanding TOPICS bibliography series, with 40 now "in print,", has provided an additional format for users of the literature. These will continue to expand in number based on expressed topical interest, with updated revisions on a regular basis.

<u>USGA TGIF itself</u>
USGA TGIF passed a milestone in February, when the 20,000th record was entered into the database. Continuous growth of the file reflects both the current growth of the literature and the processing of materials published since 1972. By the end of September 1991, over 21,300 records had been entered.

<u>Conclusion</u>
Continued software and database evolution, enhanced services and data availability, and an aggressive outreach and marketing program will characterize the upcoming project period. Thank you for your continued support of our efforts to provide universal, convenient, comprehensive, rapid, and affordable access to the turf science literature.

TURFGRASS INFORMATION CENTER

USGA Turfgrass Information File

FINAL ANNUAL PROJECT REPORT

1990-1991

Michigan State University Libraries
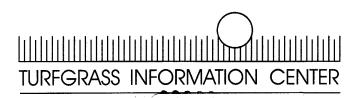
INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

During the 1990-1991 project reporting year, the USGA Turfgrass Information File project continued to grow and expand, in terms of both database construction and services to subscribers and the industry as a whole. During February of 1991, the milestone 20,000th record was entered into the database. Focal effort during the year on ease-of-use issues resulted in significant modifications, revisions, and enhancements to the online system. These changes, and continuing ones in their spirit, have positioned the database and TIC's associated services for a new phase of promotion, outreach, and the production of spin-off products.

HIGHLIGHTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Ease-of-Use
    A wide range of specific changes, additions, and enhancements were made to the online system to "make it easier to use." These steps included:

        *   TOPICS structure underway, with a menu-driven approach to file selection, as well as the opportunity to either 1) browse the TOPIC online, or 2) download it directly to the PC. The number of TOPICS now available online and offline (in a printed format) exceeds 40, on a wide range of popular and timely issues such as groundwater, runoff, transitional overseeding, green construction, irrigation scheduling, etc.

        *   New menu system implemented, converting the menu options to a structure and format (eg. bounce bars) more familiar to the majority of PC users.

        *   Log-on and Log-off steps reduced at the host computer end, resulting in a "cleaner" and quicker connection process. This effort will continue through the fall of 1991, when significant changes to the PC-based software will speed it even further. The "new and improved" version was demonstrated during the Committee's site visit in May and has been in BETA testing and under continued improvement since that time.

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* STAR (database software) screen revisions (inside USGA TGIF); simplifying commands, screen movement, and readability. The eventual objective is to move towards the elimination of a command line structure for inexperienced searchers, as well as continuation of the availability of the more sophisticated search capabilities for more experienced searchers.

* Keywords from the <u>Turfgrass Thesaurus</u> now are searchable directly as a phrase.

* Search set control display control greatly strengthened (eg. PgUp; PgDn).

* "Quick Exit" from anywhere inside USGA TGIF back to the menu system implemented (<F7>).

* Highlighting of imbedded search terms in record displays eases quick scanning for relevance evaluation.

Simulator Availability

Beginning in August, the <u>USGA TGIF Simulator Series</u> became available for distribution to subscribers and prospective subscribers. This MS-DOS product provides an overview of the project and database, as well as simulating online searching and providing instruction in search technique and mechanics. We anticipate that the <u>Simulator</u> will be adopted for classroom as well as individualized orientation to USGA TGIF. Response to the disk's availability has been good.

Database Construction

During the year ending 30 April 1991, a total of 2,519 new records were added to the database, bringing the size of USGA TGIF to over 21,300 at 30 September 1991. While slightly below the '89/90 production total, this is notable in light of the project focus on ease-of-use issues and staff turnover during this period. This annual production figure continues to be well above projected project targets.

Levels of Use

1. Offline

During the 1990/1991 reporting year, a total of just over 500 requests for searches or services were received at TIC. These originated from 42 states and five countries. Of the total, approximately 28% were superintendents, 20% were corporate users, 25% were undergraduate or graduate students, and 10% were researchers. A total of just over 24,000 records were offprinted in response to these requests, as well as over 400 document deliveries.

2. Online

During the year 41% of paying subscribers to the system took advantage of the ability to directly access the online system and logged on at least once, while a total of 24.4% of all subscribers have never logged-on. We do not expect radical changes in these percentages in the immediate future. In particular, the promotion of telephone access and verbal requests for searches may dampen online demand, with "Subscription" as a way to gain access to reduced service rates and to show support for the project.

Total online connect time for the year was approximately 2523 hours, representing 78 different users, thus averaging about 32 hours per user.

Revenue Patterns

"Income" generated as a result of charges for TIC services (eg. subscription fees, search charges, etc.) since the beginning of fee-for-service operation (8/88) has averaged about $1100/mo. The general trend for receipts is upward, with seasonal patterns beginning to show, though these are currently not analyzed. Recent efforts to promote the project by Green Section staff through site visit report addenda, slide displays at conferences, and small steps which cumulatively add up to major perceptual and awareness gains (such as the TurfTwisters query, and the addition of TGIF to the title page of the Record) have made a clear impact on search and information requests during the year.

Project Staff

In July of 1990, Ms. Carol Case joined the TIC staff as Library Assistant III. Ms. Tricia Baker, who had been with the project since 1986 in this capacity, relocated out-of-state.

Graduate Assistant Mr. Thomas Carlson contributed through much of the year to continuing vocabulary development work on the Turfgrass Thesaurus ("authority work" in libraryese), USGA TGIF record indexing, and editorial review.

At the behest of MSU Director of Libraries Dr. Hiram Davis, Mr. Carl Lee, newly appointed Associate Director for Systems and Access Services, has assumed administrative responsibility for the project. Mr. Peter Cookingham continues as Project Manager.

PROJECT TRENDS

Custom Searching vs. "Prepared" Searches

Clearly we have begun an evolutionary deemphasis of custom searching online using telecommunications as the most important attribute of the USGA TGIF project. It will always remain an important element for certain groups of users and for interested (and motivated) individuals in their information-seeking behaviors, but it is probable that for the majority of golf course superintendents other delivery modes and permutations will be more "useful" and, thus, valued. The Topics files are an

example of such a permutation, as well as the upcoming <u>Turfgrass Index</u>. USGA TGIF will always be necessary for the construction of these products, as well as future computer-based access alternatives (eg. CD-ROM). Direct online interactive use of such a file (ie. custom searching of USGA TGIF) at this point in the software technology curve may continue to be a secondary use, except for those trained to use it effectively. "Artificial intelligence" techniques, some to be implemented during the coming project year, may alter this pattern in the future.

Telephone Emphasis
The strategic value of emphasizing personal telephone search requests is clear. We have heard from a number of "potential" users who report that, "they have always thought that it was for computers only." Personalized, responsive, and time-sensitive interactions will play an increasing role in this effort.

Cumulative Awareness
One of the conceptual underpinnings of this project is the building of cumulative bibliographic awareness across the discipline and profession. This is no small task; it will take years and creative marketing. Many small steps, like those taken by the Green Section discussed above, will achieve the goal. MEDLINE existed for 20 years before its effectiveness was evaluated in a clinical setting; no one questions its usefulness in a research context. This project is covering new ground, for a project on such a small scale.

Promotion and Marketing
As the 1992/1993 project proposal clearly indicates, marketing and promotion will be the upcoming focus for the project. It is clear that future continuation of serious bibliographic activity in turf culture by the MSU Libraries will require substantially increased levels of industry support.

Continuation of Ease-Of-Use Efforts
Refinements will continue to be made to the online system in order to "make it easier to use." This will never cease to be an objective.

"The Front End"
We have begun the process of moving towards a PC-based "front-end" system, conceptually similar to that of GHIN. Some files and options will be located entirely on the PC, while others will be within the online system and require (at this point) a telecommunications linkage. Flexibility, convenience, and cost-effectiveness are all maximized in this way. There are some disadvantages, though (eg. currency), which can be partially mitigated by system design.

Build USGA TGIF
It goes without saying that without the continued construction of USGA TGIF is essential for most all TIC activities. Additional data structures, more efficient file construction techniques (eg. scanning), and potential cooperative arrangements will be examined closely.

Print Products
With more than a little irony, USGA TGIF has begun to show its "printed" face. It may easily be that interest in this form of access will supersede online interest in the short term. The printed Topics, custom specific indexes, and The Turfgrass Index, are all examples of this new front. Far more potential users of TGIF will be familiar with a printed product than an online one.

Topics expansion
The Topics section will continue to expand, based on demand and available time. A "Cooperating Editors Program" may be in order for these.

Cooperative Projects
Several cooperative projects are anticipated, including:
1. Cooperating Publishers Program
2. International Cooperators Program
3. Contributing Subscribers Program .

While varying widely in nature and specifics, each intends to broaden involvement in the USGA TGIF construction process, produce greater awareness through publications, etc., and increase revenue to the project.

SUMMARY

The USGA's continued involvement in the construction and development of the USGA Turfgrass Information File has resulted in good progress in approaching the goal of universal, convenient, comprehensive, rapid, and affordable access to the turf science literature. Our thanks for your continuing support, interest, and cooperation.