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The New York State Turfgrass Advocacy Day Highlights Legislative Issues

by Michael Maffei, CGCS

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Advocacy Day draws a full house.

The 19th Annual New York State Turfgrass Advocacy Day was held February 28 at the Empire State Plaza in Albany, NY, with 59 superintendents and other industry professionals eager to discuss this year's priority issues: Support for the Turfgrass Environmental Stewardship Fund, the Adoption of a State Definition of IPM, Parity for 3A, 3B Pesticide Applicator Fees, and Proposed Call-In Pay Regulations.

Advocacy Day-goers made 67 visits to legislators' offices to drive home the importance of these legislative issues. Joining me in representing the MetGCSA were Rob Alonzi; Todd Apgar; Brian Benedict; Brian Bontemps; Ken Benoit, Jr., CGCS; John Carlone, CGCS; Matt Ceplo, CGCS; Blake Halderman, CGCS; Michael Maffei, CGCS; Mike McCall, CGCS and Bob Nielsen, Jr., CGCS.

Also joining us again at this year's event were two national associations: the National Association of Landscape Professionals, which was represented by Paul Mendelsohn and Bob Mann, and the Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment (RISE), which was represented by Riley Titus and Barbara Ahern.

Event Kickoff

The event kicked off with an association breakfast and welcoming remarks by NYSTA President Jim Hornung, Jr., CSP, CLP, and NYSTA Government Relations Committee Co-chair Steve Griffen.

Todd Vandervort of the New York Alliance for Environmental Concerns spoke on the legislative climate in Albany and budget issues currently being debated in the Legislature. He also noted that the time was right to

meet with legislators since they were in the midst of final budget negotiations.

Guest speaker Senator Catharine Young welcomed everyone to Albany and expressed her support for our issues, especially the Adoption of a State Definition of IPM. Senator Young annually introduces a bill legislating this definition and the bill passes the Senate each year.

Issues of the Day

After the introductory speeches, industry leaders spoke to attendees about the following issues:

Garnering Support for the Turfgrass Environmental Stewardship Fund

[Jim Hornung, Jr., CSP, CLP, President of the New York State Turfgrass Association](#)

Jim spoke about the status and importance of the Turfgrass Environmental Stewardship Fund (TESF), reporting that it was our Number One issue for the day. The 2017-2018 New York State Budget included a \$150,000 appropriation to support research that provides improved turf management solutions, as well as educational outreach programs.

Continuing research is essential in providing turf management solutions that are key in preserving and protecting environmental quality. With this in mind, NYSTA recommended that legislators fund a \$200,000 line item in the 2018 -2019 budget.

In the budget passed on April 1, the legislature did allocate \$150,000 for the TESF.



GlenArbor Superintendent and BMP Committee Chair Ken Benoit, Jr., CGCS, emphasizes the importance of supporting the ongoing development of the BMPs for New York State Golf Courses.

In 2017, \$25,000 of this funding went toward supporting the ongoing development of the BMPs for New York State Golf Courses. GlenArbor Superintendent Ken Benoit, Jr., CGCS emphasized the importance of continuing to fund BMP initiatives. He also introduced the newly formed New York Golf Course Foundation, which replaces the original BMP Committee. The foundation is a 501(c)3 corporation with board members from each New York State golf course superintendent association, ensuring representation from the entire state. The foundation serves the same function as the committee did. It's just that the foundation is able to solicit donations that are then tax deductible.

In addition to focusing their discussions on the issues of the day, attendees were encouraged to present the BMP concept to legislators during each of their visits.

Adopting a State Definition of IPM

[Steve Whipple, New York State Turfgrass Association](#)

Steve reviewed the Adoption of a State Definition of IPM, stating that NYSTA believes New York State would be best served by adopting the IPM terminology recognized by the Food Quality Protection Act, the National Integrated Pest Management Network, and the Empire State Council of Agricultural Organizations. Several legislative proposals define

IPM as using pesticides as a last resort. As we all know, pesticides are used as a tool in an IPM program.

NYSTA supports S524 (introduced by Senator Young) and A526 (introduced by Assemblywoman Gunther), which define integrated pest management as a "systematic approach to managing pests that utilizes a diversity of management options to minimize health, environmental, and economic risks and impacts. These options may include biological, cultural, physical, and chemical tools to prevent pest infestations or reduce them to acceptable levels."

The good news: Senator Young's bill has passed the Senate and Assemblywoman Gunther's bill is currently in the Assembly Environmental Conservation committee.

Parity for 3A, 3B Certified Applicator Fees

[Larry Wilson, Chairman of the New York Alliance for Environmental Concerns](#)

Larry explained that 3A, 3B certified commercial pesticide applicators have been paying \$200 per year (\$600 over three years) and have an annual certification period. By contrast, the other 25 classifications have paid \$450 every three years and have a three-year certification period.

NYSTA requested parity within the certified commercial system by lowering the annual 3A and 3B fees to \$150 per year and realigning the certification time period from one to three years. NYSTA, therefore, supports bills S1045 (introduced by Senator Funke) and A1630 (introduced by Assemblyman Skoufis). The requested change was approved in the State budget and went into effect on April 1.



Michael Maffei, CGCS, Back O' Beyond Superintendent and NYSTA Government Relations Committee Co-chair, explains proposed revisions to call-in pay regulations.

Proposed Revisions to Call-In Pay Regulations

[Michael Maffei, CGCS, New York State Turfgrass Association](#)

In November 2017, the New York State Department of Labor published proposed regulations that would revise call-in pay requirements in New York State. What is call-in pay? In short, call-in pay requires that employers provide four hours of compensation to employees whose shift is cancelled less than 72 hours before the start of the shift ("cancelled shift"), when the employee is required to be in contact less than 72 hours before the shift to find out whether to report to work for that shift ("call for schedule"), and when the employee is required to be available to report to work ("on-call"). Two additional hours of call-in pay are required when a shift is scheduled less than 14 days before the start of the shift ("unscheduled shift").

Adhering to any further regulations in call-in pay will be especially difficult for those businesses affected by weather: landscaping, lawn care, snow removal, and golf course maintenance to name several.

Michael explained that this is not a legislative issue, but rather a regulation proposed by the New York State Labor Department. It's important that we speak to our legislators about how these proposed regulations will adversely affect our businesses and also emphasize that if these regulations do get adopted, we need legislation to rescind them.

Legislative Visits and Closing Activities

Rick Zimmerman from the New York Alliance for Environmental Concerns offered attendees tips on how to make the most of their visits. After the presentations, attendees had the opportunity to meet with legislators and share their views and recommendations on the issues.

When the visits were completed, attendees returned for a luncheon and wrap-up of the morning's activities. They also had the opportunity to share any feedback they received during their legislator visits with NYSTA Government Relations Committee Co-chair Steve Griffen for follow-up.

Pleased with the outcome of the legislator visits, Rick felt this year's Advocacy Day was highly successful in fostering an understanding and appreciation of our industry by New York State legislative leaders.

"Our efforts solidified \$150,000 in support for the Environmental Stewardship Fund," he noted, "and secured a reduction in certified applicator fees by \$50 per year. I want to thank those of you who made the time and effort to participate in this year's Advocacy Day. It was a great success because of all of you."

Benefits of Being Involved

If you are not a member of NYSTA, please consider joining. Your membership provides NYSTA with the resources needed to plan and implement many informative industry-related events, not the least of which is our annual Turfgrass Advocacy Day. Particularly important to preserving our livelihood, the Advocacy Day is designed to:

- * Protect you and your golf course from losing the tools needed to perform your job
- * Prevent any onerous new regulations from adversely affecting our industry
- * Advocate for changes to - or the repeal of - laws and regulations that affect our clubs

If you would like more information on NYSTA or the New York State Turfgrass Advocacy Day, you will find it on the NYSTA website: www.nysta.org. Though you may not have been able to attend, consider visiting your assembly member or senator in their district offices or writing them to discuss these issues.

Please give serious consideration to attending the Turfgrass Advocacy Day on February 13, 2019. Laws and regulations affect everyone, and your input is important!

Special Thanks to Our Sponsors

We would like to acknowledge the following sponsors who helped make this successful event possible:

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NYSTA Challenge - Steve Smith Memorial Golf Tournament.

Michael Maffei, CGCS is the golf course superintendent at Back O'Beyond in Brewster, NY, is a past president of NYSTA and co-chair of the NYSTA Government Relations Committee.