

# Turfgrass Producers International

## E-Newsletter

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November 2008

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## Setting The Record Straight

The following letter was mailed to the editor of *The New Yorker* magazine following an article in which it was suggested that "a lawn has no productive value".

Letter to the Editor:

Elizabeth Kolbert did a great job of condensing the history of the American lawn in the article Turf War (July 21, 2008); however, her research on the value of lawns is severely lacking.

As one of the referenced organizations in the article, "The Lawn Institute" feels compelled to point out an incorrect observation in the text. We challenge the validity of the following quote, "A lawn may be pleasing to look at, or provide the children a place to play, or offer the dog room to relieve himself, but it has no productive value." We agree that a place for children to play is extremely important in this day and age when there is a genuine concern regarding inactive and overweight children. It should have been noted in the article that lawns provide many environmental and other benefits.

Turfgrasses are green plants that act as carbon sinks removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere while providing clean oxygen in return. A recent study suggests lawns actually store four times the carbon emissions of the lawn mowers used to maintain them. Lawns decrease the urban heat island effect and can reduce the need for air conditioning in the summer (which reduces the use of fossil fuels and water). Turfgrass lawns are great for erosion control, they keep our surface waters clean by decreasing runoff, especially in planned communities and help purify water before it reaches our aquifers. Lawns allow homeowners a way to revamp what was damaged

during home construction. If the area was to be reestablished into forest or prairie the environmental toll would be colossal. Soil runoff and erosion would clog our rivers, lakes and streams to an even greater extent.

It has been scientifically proven that installation of maintained turfgrass lawns around freshwater sources are better at keeping contaminants out of the water when compared to reestablished native prairie mixes.

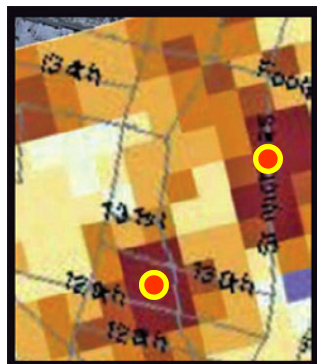
It appears that Ms. Kolbert didn't take the time to investigate the benefits of lawns to provide a balanced perspective. Unfortunately, as suggested by Ms. Kolbert's quote referenced at the outset of this correspondence, it is often easier to condemn something due to a lack of knowledge, or perhaps a predisposition, then to spend the time needed to understand and convey the facts. We regret that millions of dollars and the research of hundreds of scientists to develop turfgrasses that provide these benefits while conserving water and requiring fewer inputs is ignored by authors with an agenda. We challenge all your readers to investigate all the benefits of a natural turfgrass lawn which are often overlooked and grossly understated.

For a complete list and more information about the benefits of lawns, please visit:

<http://www.thelawninstitute.org>

**T. Kirk Hunter**  
Executive Director  
The Lawn Institute

## Thermal images generated from NASA satellite point out "Heat Island" hot spots in New York. But what are they?



When Columbia University climate researcher Stuart Gaffin analyzed thermal images generated from NASA satellite maps of New York City he noticed numerous hot spots (dark areas) on the maps. He assumed they were rooftops. We have highlighted those areas with red dots to show the intense heat locations that peaked Gaffin's interest. But were they rooftops as Gaffin suspected? See the answer on Page 3.



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**Interesting Fact:**

"A 4-inch high turfgrass area along a road reduces vehicle noise levels by 40% at a distance of 70 feet."

SOURCE: Cook, D.I., and D.F. Van Haverbeke. 1971. Trees and shrubs for noise abatement. University of Nebraska, Nebraska Agric. Exp. Stn. Bull. 246, Lincoln, NE.

## Consumer Reports

Consumer Reports National Research Center surveyed 1,005 adult homeowners and found Americans recognize the importance of their lawns and some actually like doing yardwork. The following are just a few excerpts from the survey:

- 28% say they have the best lawn on their block.
- 64% say a neighbor has the best lawn.
- 26% would prefer less lawn and more flowers, rocks or native landscaping.
- 38% never water their lawns.
- 23% spend at least 5 hours per week doing yard work.
- 45% said they spend less than three hours per week doing lawn and yard work.
- 42% like mowing or find it relaxing.
- 49% say people who neglect their lawns are lazy or inconsiderate.
- 39% said that a perfect lawn raises property values or boosts curb appeal.

**For more results visit:**

<http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/home-garden/resource-center/lawn-care-5-08/yard-survey/lawn-care-yard-survey.htm>



## News from The Lawn Institute



**SCLTA**  
South Carolina  
Landscape & Turfgrass Association

Ellen Parsons Thames, Executive

Director of the South Carolina Landscape & Turfgrass Association has announced that future issues of SCLTA's quarterly newsletter, "Landscape", will begin to feature excerpts from The Lawn Institute's monthly newsletter - *The Lawn Guide*. In response to the announcement, Rusty Stachlewitz, Program Director for The Lawn Institute, stated, "We thank SCLTA for their support in helping us disseminate beneficial information that not only builds awareness, but helps The Lawn Institute educate, inform and reach a broader audience."

For more information about SC Landscape & Turfgrass you can visit their website: <http://sclta.com/index.html>

## Remembering A Friend

The following is an open letter from Ike Thomas to the family and friends of Mel Briggs of Briggs Sod Farm/ Briggs Brothers, Inc., of Stanley, Kansas following Mel's tragic passing after a car accident.

**"Mel Briggs was a lifelong turf producer in the Kansas City area. He helped me and many other turf producers, even his competitors, get into the business and stay in the business. His efforts improved the industry."** - Ike Thomas



Mel Briggs

"I first met Mel in 1973 and we became friends in 1975 when he was one of the hosts of TPI's summer convention in Kansas City. Mel, quickly became a mentor to me and my family. He encouraged and gave improvement advice to many equipment manufacturers. He readily offered counsel not only to us but to many turf producers from around the world. His recommendations ranged from what type of grass to grow in different locations, to promoting different products in various markets. He readily offered consultation on everything from the type of turf to grow, to seeding rates, mowing, how to harvest turf, even harvesting plugs of turf and marketing the same.

Mel played a significant role in helping us grow our business into a nationwide turf company. He persuaded us to be early adapters of new and improved equipment and techniques. He encouraged, or more descriptively, pushed people into participation in local and international turf associations. He was always promoting and pushing toward the betterment of the industry.



Some of the more than twenty turfgrass farm trucks that were in the funeral procession for Mel Briggs.

I have many stories I could relate about Mel and his help to us, our company and our industry, but suffice it to say he had a profound and positive effect on us and many other turf producers around the world.

The above photo shows just a few of the more than twenty turfgrass producer trucks that were in Mel's funeral procession. Every truck was from a different turfgrass farm, all of which Mel had helped in some way or another.

We owe a great deal of thanks and gratitude to Mel. Thank you Mel, we will miss you greatly."

Very Sincerely,  
Ike Thomas

Former President  
Thomas Bros. Grass Co.  
Turfgrass America  
TPI (Turfgrass Producers International)



Ike Thomas  
Granbury, Texas, USA



## Were Those “Hot Spots” in New York City Just Rooftops?

*“Without the natural system of evaporation that living grasses have, everything's working in one direction to turn sunlit synthetic turf fields into heat islands.” -*

Stuart Gaffin, Climate Researcher—Columbia University, New York, NY



## High Temps On [Synthetic] Turf Fields Spark Safety Concerns

Were the “hot spots” in the NASA images “rooftops” as climate researcher Stuart Gaffin first speculated? To make sure he picked five or six really hot locations in the Bronx during August 2008 and went to visit them. “Two turned out to be synthetic turf fields”, says Gaffin. To understand just how hot the synthetic fields can get, he visited Riverside Park in Manhattan with Geoffrey Croft, founder of NYC Park Advocates.

Carrying a thermometer, Croft stood at the periphery of one of the turf fields that's used for a soccer camp. "In the shade it's 86 degrees, but out in the center of the soccer field where kids are playing soccer, the sun is directly overhead", reported Allison Aubrey of National Public Radio (NPR).

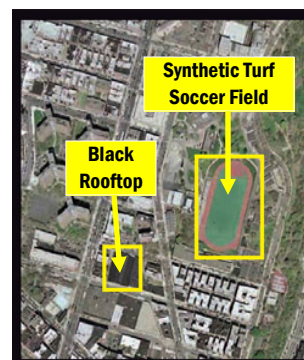
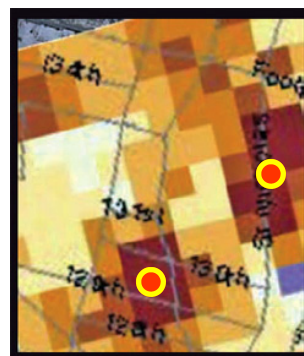
Holding his thermometer waist-high, Croft got a reading of 160.6 degrees Fahrenheit or 71.4 degrees Celsius. Was Croft surprised? "It's way higher than I thought it would be," he said. Aubrey went on to report that as the soccer coaches called a water break, which they did every fifteen minutes or so, a group of 8 and 9 year-olds stood dripping in sweat. "It's hot," said eight year-old Michael-Luca Natt. "Very hot."

Interested in learning more? Listen to reporter Allison Aubrey's broadcast as aired on NPR's Morning Edition at the following website:

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=93364750>

**TPI FACT:** During a “Synthetic Surface Heat Study” conducted at Brigham Young University one day in June 2002 the high surface temperature recorded showed natural turfgrass at 88.5°F (31.4°C) and synthetic turf at 156°F (68.8°C) a difference of 67.5°F (37.4°C). The synthetic field scored higher than asphalt, concrete and bare soil.

SOURCE: "Synthetic Surface Heat Studies"  
C. Frank Williams and Gilbert E. Pulley  
Brigham Young University



## NEW “Turfgrass Lawn Guide” Marketing and Educational Materials Are On There Way!

Sample packet with Order Form will be mailed to all TPI members later this month.



## TurfSide-UP



... and we sometime's rake's, fertilize's and water's too!

## A TIP OF THE HAT

to **John Cospers**, Executive Director of Turfgrass Producers of Texas for the following comments that appeared in his column of "The Pallet" in September 2008:

"TPI has many successful programs that benefit turfgrass producers. They are supporting research in a number of areas, spreading the word on the benefits of turfgrass, educating homeowners, landscapers and others, providing resources for producers and working with legislators and regulators. The 2008 Farm Bill now specifies turfgrass as a "specialty crop". TPI was largely responsible for getting that done. What difference does that make? A bunch. In the past we were not eligible for certain marketing and research dollars because turfgrass was not listed. Now we are."



John Cospers has been active in TPI's Regional Groups & Associations Working Group and a strong supporter of turfgrass producers worldwide.

## IT'S ALL IN THE NUMBERS 13 - 13 - 9 - 11

**David Doguet** of Bladerunner Farms in Poteet, Texas recently called the TPI office regarding his TPI membership ID number. Doguet, like so many other turfgrass producers, is feeling the downside of the economy and needs all the good luck he can muster. At issue was Doguet's member ID number - 1313. "That's two thirteens! Thirteen is not a lucky number is it? And I have two of them!"

have his number changed. Susan informed Doguet that his ID number (which he has had for over twenty years) wasn't really thirteen-thirteen but rather one thousand three hundred and thirteen, or one-three-one-three. Doguet paused, accepted the response and then added, "Okay . . . Okay . . . I'll keep it. It's just that two thirteens didn't feel so good! And the fact that my birth date is on 9/11 doesn't seem to help much either."

Doguet asked to speak to Susan Hall, TPI's Membership & Marketing Manager to see if he could

Thank you to David Doguet for his permission to share this story.

## Goodbye and Good Luck to Kelly Butler

TPI's executive director, Kirk Hunter, has announced that TPI's Education & Meetings Manager, Kelly Butler has submitted her resignation.

In making the announcement, Hunter said, "As many of our members know, Kelly has given TPI over three years of dedicated service and has made a great contribution to help advance our association. Although Kelly's announcement was a surprise, we realize she was presented with a great opportunity to further her career. We all wish Kelly the very best in her new venture and sincerely appreciate her contribution and service to TPI."



Kelly Butler

## The Art of Mowing

Baseball may be best known as an American pastime, but appreciation for the art of mowing turfgrass is universal. Dave Mellor, the grounds manager at Fenway Park in Boston, Massachusetts, home of the Boston Red Sox, is known for his creative ingenuity when it comes to mowing the playing field. Although Mellor never fulfilled his dream of becoming a professional baseball player "The Field of Dreams" he creates throughout the playing season is something to behold.



Aerial view of Dave Mellor's handy work at Boston's Fenway Park.