

MTESP Planning and Prioritization

Draft Document

November 10, 2005

Background

The Michigan Turfgrass Environmental Stewardship Program (MTESP) was launched in 1998 as a partnership with the Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA), Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), Michigan State University (MSU), and the Michigan Turfgrass Foundation (MTF), representing the turfgrass industry. The primary funding source for the program was and continues to be a grant to the MTF from the Groundwater Protection Fund administered from the MDA Groundwater Stewardship Program (\$55,000 this fiscal year). Additional support and/or endorsement of the program also comes from the Michigan Golf Course Owners Association (MGCOA) and the Golf Association of Michigan (GAM). Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) were executed in the past and the most recent MOU was signed in August 2005 (running to December 31, 2005) to formalize the working relationship between the Michigan Department of Agriculture, Michigan Turfgrass Foundation and Michigan State University. The MDEQ was not included in this recent MOU because they discontinued a direct financial contribution to the program about 5 years ago, but continue to support the program in principle and with some staff involvement support.

Currently, the MDA pays for Debbie Swartz's salary, benefits and travel expenses as part of their contribution to the MTESP. MSU pays for 85% of Ron Calhoun's salary, dedicated to the program and provides office space and administrative support for the program. The MTF is the MDA grantee and provides grant administration and program oversight through Kay Patrick and Tom Smith. The program also generates revenue through program fees and workshops, which represents additional turfgrass industry funding.

Two program staff (Marc McMullen and Pam Lamb) is paid for through the MDA grant and program fees, and program expenses are also covered with these revenue sources.

The MTESP is a voluntary proactive initiative designed to prevent pollution and increase compliance with environmental laws on golf properties. The program represents a partnership between the Michigan Turfgrass Foundation, Michigan State University, Michigan Department of Agriculture, Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, Michigan Golf Course Owners Association, Golf Association of Michigan, and four regional Golf Course Superintendents Associations.

The MTESP offers a number of services including:

- Identification of state and federal laws affecting the golf industry related to drinking water and irrigation wells, fuel storage, pesticides and fertilizers, and emergency response plans
- On-site visits and workshops providing compliance assistance, technical assistance, pollution prevention and "green" purchasing information

- Updates on pending legislation impacting the golf industry
- Buffer strips to increase surface water protection and wildlife habitat
- Public recognition for stewardship achievements

The program currently has 226 participating golf properties. Fifty eight of these courses are certified in the program.

Surveys of Member and Non-Member Michigan Golf Courses

The Michigan Turfgrass Environmental Stewardship Program (MTESP) had the ANRECS Center for Evaluative Studies conduct two surveys. Current members of the program were surveyed in the spring 2003, with non-members surveyed in the fall of 2004. The purpose of the first survey was to gather information about member demographics, learn about the impact the program is having on member's stewardship practices, to discover how MTESP could assist the members in the future, and better promote the program. The purpose of the non-member survey was to evaluate the level of program knowledge and to identify potential new services and program offerings to increase participation in MTESP. Below are the results of the surveys as they apply to the strategic planning sessions.

In the survey sent to our 258 members, 125 courses or a 53.2% response rate was obtained. This response size could lead to biasness in the findings. Courses were asked questions regarding demographic information and about their involvement in the MTESP. The questions about the MTESP regarded benefits and reasons for participation and how the MTESP could help members in the future. The results from this survey show strong support for the core materials of the program, with 72.8% of those surveyed responding that they were either certified or planning on obtaining certification. Golf courses were asked what the MTESP could provide to them in the future and the top responses were:

1. Federal Guidelines/Safety (OSHA) information
2. Environmental Stewardship Practices, i.e., emergency training, water issues, alternative products, and habitat and native areas
3. Public Relations

Courses were asked how the MTESP could promote itself to other Michigan golf courses. The top responses were:

1. Marketing
2. Use members to market the program
3. Cost savings and reduction in liabilities
4. Use case studies and course examples

In the survey of the non-members, 726 courses were sent surveys, with 109 courses responding. Courses were asked for demographic information, current knowledge of the MTESP, current environmental practices used at the facility and finally, why the course did not participate in MTESP and what services MTESP could provide them in the future.

Results of the survey showed that the majority of those surveyed felt they were familiar with the MTESP. Those familiar with the program seemed to have a good idea of the services that the MTESP provides to its members. Many of the courses are currently using the same stewardship practices used by MTESP members. The results also showed that some of the stewardship practices non-members are currently using have been changed due to attending a MTESP workshop, field day or talk.

The results that were most helpful in the strategic planning and prioritization process were why the golf course was not a member of MTESP and what services or information the MTESP could provide them in the future that would encourage them to become a member. The main reasons stated for not becoming a member included:

- Already members of too many programs and/or associations
- Budget constraints and could not become a member or make the changes required to become certified
- Management does not want to join due to budget constraints or don't see the benefit of joining
- Not familiar with the MTESP

Finally the respondents were asked what types of products or services the MTESP could provide them that would benefit and entice them to become members in the future. The top responses were:

- Continuing education workshops
- Cost benefit analysis of environmental stewardship practices
- Information, i.e., examples and processes to meet state regulations
- A better understanding of the principal benefits for being a member of MTESP
- Annual mailings of compliance regulation changes
- Information to share with owners, managers, pros, etc.

The MTESP has put on 11 membership workshops from March 2nd, 2004 through March 29th, 2005. The workshops have been spread throughout the state in the following manner;

- 3 in the Greater Detroit area
- 3 in the Mid-Michigan area
- 2 in Northern Michigan
- 1 in the Upper Peninsula
- 2 in the Western Michigan area

One hundred eight courses attended those 11 workshops with 48 of the 108 courses being new members to the program. At the end of each workshop an evaluation was given regarding how the workshop was presented, questions regarding how the current program was performing and what could be done to improve the program for the future.

Conclusions drawn from the workshop evaluation summary were that the membership thought the core material of the program was excellent. Areas that courses thought could be changed or added to improve the program included:

- More courses participating
- More management tools
- More emphasis on what is required for certification
- MiOSHA or worker safety
- Cost effectiveness of program
- IPM type suggestions
- Promote the program directly to courses
- Module on trees, shrubs and flowers
- More specific information on wash pads

Courses attending the workshops were also asked “what additional modules could be developed that would be helpful to you?” Their responses were:

- MiOSHA
- Shop materials
- Storm water/surface water pollution
- IPM
- Wildlife management
- Cost effectiveness of program (ways the MTESP saves money)
- Options for different levels of facilities relating to budget levels
- Water conservation

The survey summaries and workshop evaluations gave good information in regard to the program and what types of areas the members and turf industry are interested in for the future. Many of these areas had already been identified for future expansion of the program.

Planning and Prioritization Process

After prioritizing needs based on the member/non-member surveys and workshop evaluations, we reviewed the probability of moving forward in the identified program areas (both existing and new) given existing personnel strengths, links to other units such as the Crop and Soil Sciences Department and the MSU IPM Program, and potential to enter into new partnerships, obtain start-up grants, and generate revenue. The information below summarizes our discussions. Definitions of program areas are listed in Appendix A of this document. Short-term movement refers to the ability to address the topic promptly, possibly in about a year. Medium-term movement refers to ability to address the topic fairly soon if appropriate linkages and resources are secured. Long-term movement refers to the ability to address the topic, but only after substantial resource identification and linkages to other partners.

Summary by program area:

Regulatory Compliance: This is a fundamental strength of the program, and its maintenance is critical to the current clientele of the stewardship program. New potential audiences include additional turf segments and regional audiences. Current revenue streams are program fees. Engaging these new audiences has the potential to generate new revenue for the program. Through MTF, there is high likelihood of delivering to new turf segments the information that currently is available. There is also potential to address a regional audience that can be facilitated through a regional organization. It is crucial not to just give this resource away. Possibly a relationship can be built by simply ‘licensing’ pre-existing information. This area has very high potential for short-term movement. Priority and recommendation to stimulate movement: Very high and ongoing; link to other turf segments for increased impact, audience and revenue.

MiOSHA: This is viewed as a reasonable and possibly attractive growth area to the existing regulatory compliance program activities. This area is specific to Michigan and would benefit existing program audiences and new turf segments. This area may be delivered through program expansion (possibly making the program more attractive to existing program target audience) and/or as an added-value program module offering to existing and new turf segments. Funds/partnership from the agency overseeing MiOSHA needs to be secured to develop this area and not overtax personnel. This area has very good potential for

short-term movement and possibly even better potential for medium- term movement as partnerships are secured. Priority and recommendation to stimulate movement: High; need to link to support structure from appropriate Michigan agency.

Agronomic Practices (nutrient and pest management): This area is viewed as a reasonable and attractive growth area of the program in order to make the program more attractive to turfgrass managers. It also affords an opportunity to link to other personnel in the Crop and Soil Sciences Department, other departments, and the IPM Program (all at MSU). This area may be best offered as an added-value program module offering to existing and new turf segments. There is good potential to generate fees when delivered to new turf segments. Development of new modules can take considerable time and effort, and should be supported by grant activity. This area has very good potential for medium-term movement because needed partnerships are internal to MSU but development costs need to be identified. Priority and recommendation to stimulate movement: High; link to other turf segments for increased impact, audience, and revenue; secure start-up funds through grants such as Project GREEN and the turf industry.

Habitat Enhancement: This area is viewed as a growth area of the program that may become more attractive to turfgrass managers, but currently it does not generate a lot of unsolicited interest. It affords an opportunity to partner with the MTF director and possibly with other organizations that highlight this area (Audubon). This area may be best offered as an added-value program module offering to existing and new turf segments allowing revenue generation. Development of new modules can take considerable time and effort, but the existing materials of the MTF's director may greatly ease this burden. This area has very good potential for medium to long-term movement because development costs can be minimized and there is potential for some granting opportunities. Priority and recommendation to stimulate movement: Medium; planning specifics and investigating start-up funding are warranted.

Water Management: Aspects of this area are crucial as viewed by the reviews and due to recent legislative activity. The program has responded by securing special Project GREEN funds; additional funding opportunities should be investigated such as the water program of EPA region 5. This area may be offered as a combination of based program enhancement to make the program more attractive, and an added-value program module offering to existing and new turf segments allowing revenue generation. Development of new modules can take considerable time and effort, but as a crucial area this is being expedited by existing program staff as supported by Project GREEN. This area has very good potential for short, medium, and long-term movement because of the significant granting opportunities. Priority and recommendation to stimulate movement: High; in current development.

Construction Standards: This area has been mentioned by MDA and MDEQ partners, although the current staffing expertise is not in this area. It may afford an opportunity to partner with a state agency that is interested in this area. This area be best offered as added-value program module offering to existing and new turf segments allowing revenue generation. Development of new modules can take considerable time and effort. This area has low potential for short-term movement and only modest potential for medium to long-term movement because development costs and lack of existing expertise. Priority and recommendation to stimulate movement: Low; critical partnerships need to be identified.

Environmental Management Systems: This area has been mentioned by MDEQ partners, although the current staffing expertise is modest in this area. This area may be best offered as added-value program module offering to existing and new turf segments allowing revenue generation. Development of new modules can take considerable time and effort. This area has low potential for short-term movement and only modest potential for medium to long-term movement because development costs and lack of existing expertise. Priority and recommendation to stimulate movement: Low; critical partnerships need to be identified.

Linkages

- Expanded MTF partnership. Possibilities to expand the partnership should be examined in order to help deliver to new segments of the industry. It may be possible to sign up new segments for specific program modules and provide ‘Module Completion’ certificates. This applies to many of the existing and proposed program activities.

- Regional partnerships. There have been queries by regional organizations to use pre-existing program information. Delivering information to new audiences outside of Michigan has merit as a revenue generation source, broad audience impact, and building links to regional partners. It is important to see this as an additional support opportunity for the existing program. That is, there should be little need to create new product or obligate large portions of staff time in this endeavor. This opportunity should be facilitated through regional organizations with delivery of program materials provided in exchange for some type of revenue stream.

Appendix A

Definitions used for the MTESP planning and prioritization:

Regulatory Compliance – The MTESP will help golf courses understand how federal, state and local laws and regulations apply to golf course properties. The staff of the MTESP will work to stay abreast of current and emerging legislation that affects golf course properties and serve as the conduit of information in these areas. Regulatory compliance is the foundation of the MTESP. This will continue to be a core part of the program. Specific MTESP program areas under regulatory compliance include: pesticide handling and application, drinking water and irrigation wells, fuel storage, water use reporting, waste management and emergency response.

Agronomic Practices – In an increasingly urban society, golf course properties provide open greenspace and are an important component of groundwater recharge. Turfgrass management practices have a profound effect on the health and vigor of the turfgrass stand and can directly or indirectly impact adjacent natural resources. It has become increasingly important for superintendents to employ all possible tactics (cultural, chemical and biological) in order to maintain healthy greenspaces that have the ability to trap or filter contaminants while minimizing the impact of biotic and abiotic stresses. A holistic approach to managing a golf course property should include comprehensive nutrient management and integrated pest management strategies. When implemented, these techniques can result in more effective/efficient use of resources and a healthier turfgrass stand, while mitigating potential areas of environmental exposure.

Habitat Enhancement – The MTESP has been a link between golf course properties and habitat enhancement organizations. Explore the potential linkages between these organizations and the MTESP.

Water Management – Water is an extremely precious commodity. The demand for water continues to outpace availability in many areas of the country and the world. This raises concern that water consumption may become unsustainable for current and future uses without significant conservation measures, importation of water from other sources or a combination of both. These have been the primary driving forces behind developing water policy in Great Lakes Basin that will protect and sustain the water resources for current and future generations. The MTESP has received a grant from Project GREEN to develop an irrigation module for golf courses. This module will provide a practical way to protect and conserve water resources through the design and installation, management, and maintenance of the irrigation system, with conservation of water resources at the root of these principles.

Construction Standards – Current MTESP materials address ways to protect water resources and other natural features on established golf course properties. In many cases, problems could be avoided if consideration was given to these elements prior to and during the construction of the course and facilities. The MTESP could link or consult outside expertise to develop comprehensive guidelines for the design, construction and grow-in of a golf course property. The target audience for these guidelines would be golf course architects and contractors.

Environmental Management Systems – Clean Corporate Citizen is a program in Michigan that formally recognizes environmentally responsible corporations. C³ corporations are also rewarded with streamlined permitting procedures. The C³ program is an opportunity where a MTESP certified course could expand their stewardship practices to include the entire golf course property. The MTESP would develop or provide materials necessary for the golf course to pursue C³ recognition.