

A WORLD WITHOUT GRASS

All of us, no matter what gender, age, or walk of life we come from, benefit from turfgrass. Our lives are improved in dozens of ways, just by its very existence. Yet few of us stop and think about what those benefits are or how different our world would be without it. Most people likely associate turfgrass with the environment and although the environmental benefits are numerous, turfgrass also contributes to our economy and our communities. The purpose of this article is to highlight the extent to which this precious resource contributes to the betterment of our lives and how vital foundations like the Ontario Turfgrass Research Foundation (OTRF) are because they ensure we take care of this resource that takes care of us.

Perhaps the best way to understand the extent to which turf contributes to our environment is to picture what a world without turfgrass would be like. Surprisingly, it's not that hard to do. All one needs to do is look back to China in the 1960's when a proclamation was put forth that stated all symbols of capitalism must be abolished – this included grassed lawns and trees. The result was a significant increase in air and noise pollution, soil erosion and temperature. Perhaps even more of a concern was the resulting dust storms that carried microscopic organisms which encouraged the spread of human disease. The Chinese government eventually realized the disastrous consequences of their actions and, to this day, continues to spend billions of dollars to repair the environmental damage that was brought about their decision.

The environmental benefits of turfgrass do not end there however. In an age where greenhouse gas emissions and excess carbon dioxide in the atmosphere garners more attention than ever before, we cannot overlook the fact that turfgrass acts as a natural carbon sink, trapping this harmful gas, all the while increasing the production of oxygen. One could go on and on about how turfgrass improves air quality, reduces the need for air conditioning by providing a cooling effect, acts as a natural filter for our ground water and reduces flooding through soil stabilization. Just as with many things in life, we don't fully appreciate the value of something until it is removed or not properly cared for.

This is the very reason the OTRF exists, to ensure the continued advancement of turfgrass through research. In fact, the OTRF, which is a registered charitable foundation, has contributed nearly \$1 million dollars toward turfgrass research over the last eight years, with many interesting projects in development. For example through the University of Guelph, Dr. Manish Raizada is researching a biological control for dandelions using probiotics. Just like with human consumption, probiotics stimulate metabolism by the addition of live microorganisms that reproduce. This probiotic for weed control uses live microorganisms from corn (naturally occurring beneficial microbes), which when applied to dandelions, acts to inhibit growth.

Over the years, the OTRF has funded many other unique projects that have helped to advance our knowledge of and our ability to promote turfgrass. The OTRF recognizes just how important this resource is to not only our environment, but also our economy and our communities at large. In Ontario, the turfgrass industry creates 33,000 jobs and contributes over \$2.6 billion dollars in revenue to our economy annually. Not to mention the fact that turfgrass provides the very foundation for so many of our community activities and youth programs. From that standpoint, turfgrass contributes to a healthy lifestyle for all of us. Without local sports fields, parks and backyards, there would be no green spaces to work, live and play on.

When we take all of this into consideration we realize just how valuable a resource turfgrass really is as it contributes to the betterment of all of our lives in immeasurable ways. It is also easy to understand why associations like the OTRF exist and why it is so important to continue to support them in their efforts to fund turfgrass research. Through donations and support from industry partners the OTRF can continue to fund turfgrass research and ensure the advancement of one of our most precious resources -grass.

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