



The Lawn Turf Enterprise



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The process of developing the turf farm began in 2003 when a working party was formed to explore options that would generate income for the club. Tom Crawford, the club's Course Superintendent at the time, came up with the idea a growing lawn turf. The idea was expanded further and a feasibility study concluded that with an injection of \$20,000.00 the enterprise would pay for itself in two years. The proposal was put to a special meeting of the club, but it was rejected on the basis that it would increase club debt and the interest burden would put the club under financial pressure.

Not to be deterred, those members committed to the proposal decided to press ahead. The turf farm was to be completely financed from outside the club, with 20 members putting up \$1000.00 each to buy a unit in a share farming arrangement. Although the compromise excluded the club from any form of ownership, it was assured that under no circumstances would it be liable for any debts incurred.

In early 2004 the land adjacent to the 10th and 18th fairways was cleared, levelled and a spray irrigation system was installed. When this initial work was completed the majority of the unit holders as well as a number of members sod-sowed the area with 'Wintergreen Couch' at the 18th fairway end of the patch and Kikuyu at the dam end. The area was then rolled and watered and the turf farm was underway. In late 2004 the first turf was harvested and in mid 2005 the club received its first dividend of \$1,612.00, which amounted to a half share of the profit.

Throughout 2005 the turf enterprise moved forward and adapted to changing circumstances. The practice fairway was levelled and set up for irrigation and planted to Kikuyu. Unfortunately, when the club was hit with water restrictions in 2006/2007 this area had to be abandoned to ensure that the original area could be maintained. In 2006 the group controlling the turf enterprise agreed to pay half the cost of employing an apprentice, made a significant contribution to the purchase of a fairway mower for the club and started to develop the area behind the 9th green, known as the 'Cricket Pitch'. Three of the original unit holders withdrew and the partnership was converted into a company with a new agreement requiring the turf farm to pay the club \$20,000.00 annually in four instalments.

The business boomed in 2007 and such was the demand locally for turf a decision was taken to harvest parts of the 1st, 7th and 18th fairways. Although this decision caused a degree of controversy, it was a financial success for

the club with a total contribution for the year in excess of \$41,000.00. During 2007 another four unit holders were bought out and the turf enterprise made a significant contribution to the club's excess water bill. Later in the year the area was transferred from F.M.I.T. water to the recycled water the club was receiving from the Red Cliffs sewerage treatment plant. The 2008 and 2009 years have not been as financially rewarding due to a variety of reasons. The whole district was under pressure with irrigation restrictions, which meant that a greater proportion of the club's recycled water was needed on the course. We also had a major change in personnel on the course, which adversely affected turf sales and this coupled with less demand for lawn turf due to water restrictions resulted in significantly less income than was otherwise expected. The return to the club in 2008 was \$21,000.00 and in 2009 it dropped to \$15,500.00. However, during this period a further ten original unit holders were bought out, which indicated to those prepared to see that even in tough times the turf farm was a valuable asset for the club.

In 2010 the Committee of Management took formal control of the turf enterprise and appointed a Course Management Committee to oversee the total course and turf farm operation. It was also decided that the remaining unit holders should be bought out as soon as funds permitted, so that the full benefit of any turf sales could flow directly to the club. In her June report to the Committee of Management Leigh Bowring reported that this objective had been achieved, meaning that the club now has full ownership of the lawn turf enterprise. With the appointment of our new Course Curator, coupled with the availability of a more secure source of water, we are back on track and turf sales have increased considerably resulting in a return to the club for the 2009 / 2010 financial year of a little over \$45,000.00.

In addition to the income for the club resulting from turf sales and the other contributions mentioned above, the turf enterprise has covered half the cost of the fuel used on the course, which amounts to just under \$5,000.00 per year. The turf enterprise has also purchased numerous megalitres of water for the club over recent years when the club was not in a financial position to do so. By any measure, the development of the turf enterprise has been a very successful innovation carried out during a difficult time for the club. It has made a significant contribution in keeping the club viable and if properly managed it has the potential to keep the club financially secure into the future.