Consumers Prefer Wear Tolerance in Lawns

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NJ Green Expo
Low Input Turf Using Fine Fescues

Currently, Kentucky bluegrass and perennial ryegrass are the two primary species used for turf in the northern United States. These species provide a high quality turf when managed with sufficient inputs; however, there has been increasing attention drawn to the negative aspects of higher input turfs, including the excessive use of water, fertilizer, fossil fuels, and pesticides.

The fine fescues – strong creeping red fescue, slender creeping red fescue, Chewings fescue, hard fescue, and sheep fescue – can be a solution to these challenges. Fine fescues are species of turfgrass that need less water, mowing, and fertilizer. These traits make the fine fescues a sustainable alternative to some of the traditionally used turfgrasses.

The next challenge is to identify ways to facilitate adoption of these fine fescues on private and public landscapes. Our team recently received a $5.4 million grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) to discover what is stopping homeowners from using fine fescues and how new varieties can be bred to overcome those obstacles. Our transdisciplinary approach will address social, marketing, technological, landscape management, and genetic barriers.

This project is a joint venture by participants from the University of Minnesota, Rutgers University, Purdue University, Oregon State University, University of Wisconsin and the USDA-ARS. It is funded by the USDA Specialty Crops Research Initiative (SCRI).
Survey on Turfgrass Consumer Preferences

Online (2014)

• 1,934 usable responses – U.S.
• 723 usable responses – Canada

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Driven to Discover
Survey on Turfgrass Consumer Preferences

1,934 from U.S.

- average age – 51
- 49% male, 61% married, 23% had one or more children under 12-yr-old
- average household size – 2 to 3 people
- mean education level – some college to a college diploma
- average annual household income – $50,000

[sample consistent with the US census data in terms of age (age group 15–83), gender, household size, education level, and income]

723 from Canada

Canadian participants were younger (average age – 41), more educated, with larger household size as well as higher household income level.
Willingness to Pay Premiums for Turfgrass Attributes (in $USD for seeds to cover 1,000 ft$^2$)

- Good Ability to Withstand Foot traffic
- Fair Ability to Withstand Foot traffic
- Mowing Frequency Low
- No Weed
- Mowing Frequency Medium
- Water Use Low
- Water Use Medium
- Fertilizer Requirement Low
- Mowing Frequency Low
- Fertilizer Requirement Medium
- Light Green
- Standup
- Wide Leaf

Canada  U.S.
Another objective: Identify potential market segments with differentiated preference for turfgrass attributes.

Specifically:

• Are there different consumer segments with different preferences for turfgrass traits in the U.S. and Canada?

• If so, what are the characteristics of the different consumer segments?

• What strategies should the turfgrass industry adopt to better target these consumer segments?
Figure 2. Consumer segments in U.S. and Canada
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Balanced Consumers</th>
<th>Low-input Conscious Consumers</th>
<th>Appearance Conscious Consumers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Are most sensitive to price.</td>
<td>• Exhibits the strongest preferences for low-input characteristics.</td>
<td>• Have the strongest preferences for appearance attributes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Care about most of the turfgrass traits.</td>
<td>o lower irrigation</td>
<td>o light green color</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Prefer</td>
<td>o less mowing</td>
<td>o upright leaves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o less irrigation</td>
<td>o less fertilizer</td>
<td>o and less weed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o better wearing ability</td>
<td>o better wearing ability</td>
<td>• Care less about the maintenance attributes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o light green</td>
<td>• Prefer</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Are least knowledgeable about lawn maintenance</td>
<td>o standup</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Maintain home lawn least frequently</td>
<td>o fewer weeds</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Are likely to be Baby Boomers and females</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Are most knowledgeable about lawn maintenance</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Water and fertilize home lawns with modest frequency</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Are most likely to be Generation X consumers</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Are likely to be Generation Y consumers</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appearance Conscious Consumers (> ⅓ of US and Canadian participants)

✓ more likely to be Generation Y consumers (millennials)

1. Have modest knowledge on lawn maintenance. Tend to irrigate and apply fertilizer more frequently to keep their home lawns looking good.

2. Attract this consumer group by providing photos on the seed package or exhibiting in-store samples of turfgrass patches.

3. Educate this group about how to maintain their home lawns more efficiently could benefit homeowners both economically and environmentally.
Different Marketing Strategies to Promote Different Turfgrass Species to Each Consumer Segment

Balanced Consumers

✓ consisted of more females and more Baby Boomers

1. Least knowledgeable about turf maintenance and most sensitive to price change (not surprising that they maintain their lawns least frequently).

2. Marketing strategies such as setting competitive prices for turfgrass seed mixes and providing in-store coupons can help retailers attract Balanced Consumers.

3. Educate about more efficient lawn maintenance methods. Thus, price-sensitive Balanced Consumers can have good-looking home lawns without spending too much money.
Different Marketing Strategies to Promote Different Turfgrass Species to Each Consumer Segment

Low-input Conscious Consumers

✓ LARGE potential market exists for low-input turfgrass in both U.S. and Canada

• Low-input turf is one solution to fulfill consumers’ needs without sacrificing the environment (they support the use of less water, energy, and fertilizer).

• Breeders should consider the size of this market segment when prioritizing low-input attributes during the development of turfgrasses.

• In fact, a large proportion of the consumer market was not aware of the existence of low-input turfgrass species.

• Promoting low-input turfgrass through advertisement and public media, the suppliers of low-input turfgrass could reach out to more consumers.