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TO Chairmen Ted Kennedy, Jr., and James Albis, and members of the Environment Committee.

**Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the two pesticide bills in today's hearing, SB 366 and HB 1063. Both aim to reduce use of pesticides on lawns and turf.** I am a retired public school teacher and sports coach from here in Connecticut; a certified and experienced grass and turf manager for golf courses, an avid fly fisherman; a student of rivers (I live next to the Shepaug); and a volunteer with Rivers Alliance of Connecticut.

Recently I've spoken with several school facilities and field managers here and in neighboring states to find out how their athletic fields were doing with and without pesticides. Their observations were highly consistent with my own experience on golf courses.

At the K-8 level, playable turf can be achieved without pesticides through monitoring and adjusting cultural practices. Irrigation, mowing, and fertilization can and should be implemented with the goal of maintaining sound soil. Changing the focus from growing lush grass to building strong soil is a critical and necessary shift in thinking in the change to organic methods of turf management. Additional cultural practices such as aerating, coring, spiking and slicing, as well as frequent overseeding, are needed to help promote strong soil and strong turf.

From the grounds managers I spoke with the most often cited organic controls, although they are effective, are rarely employed because they are too expensive. Nematodes, milky spore, blood meal, corn meal and other soil treatments just aren't used because of their cost. Municipal budgets don't allow for them. Fortunately, playable turf can be achieved without them by adjusting standard cultural practices.

In an organic program, the guideline for irrigation is to water less frequently, but water deeply. This encourages roots to grow deeper and establish turf with an anchor. Watering at night should be avoided because the moisture lingers and fosters turf diseases. Many managers I talked to have no irrigation at all and must rely on rainfall. They have to take the measure of the rainfall into their strategy of how to apply the balance of other cultural practices. Much rain most likely means more mowing.

The application of fertilizers also needs adjustment under an organic regimen. Managers I spoke to found the best success by fertilizing more frequently but with lighter applications. This helps to keep grass growth at a slow, constant rate, which maintains balance within the root system and the soil. Mowing can also be more evenly spaced to coincide with this steady growth rate.

Mowing height should be kept between "2 ½" - "3". This eliminates the stress from cutting at lower heights- there is more blade or leaf available for photosynthesis, which also strengthens the root system. It also provides more ground cover and therefore less vulnerability to soil compaction.

Compaction is a result of traffic, which many managers spoke of as a major concern. Those who can, rotate field use to distribute traffic and compaction. Some managers have practice fields, which are used to lighten traffic and wear on game fields. They can also rotate areas within a field to address the same problem. On a lacrosse field, for example, goals set at the north/south ends that become worn, can be switched to the east/west ends. Traffic is the cause of much of the managers' problems, as it causes compaction and creates favorable conditions for broadleaf weeds and crabgrass. Managers spoke of handling traffic not just from school teams, but from park and rec leagues and soccer and lacrosse clubs as well. Fields are often overused, beyond the capacity from which they can replenish themselves. As a planning factor, future athletic field complexes should include a healthy portion of practice fields to allow for traffic and wear.

To combat wear and compaction, managers universally used more aeration of the soil, combined with frequent overseeding. This can be done with an aerator, or through spiking, slicing or coring. Many managers stated that frequent use of these techniques, combined with overseeding, helps keep new turf germinating and maintain root structure. This practice was always cited as a key method to maintain strong turf organically.

Grubs are a common problem in stressed fields. For a sustainable solution to grubs, the above practices have been shown to be effective. Traffic and budget are the main determinants.

Many managers spoke of, or alluded to, the expectation from the public for "showcase" fields. They work hard to grow and maintain the best turf possible under the traffic loads the fields must bear, yet often have no voice in how or when fields are used. Repeatedly, they stressed the importance of the support of the athletic department and the school administration in achieving playable athletic fields under heavy traffic loads. Clearly then, a change in expectation is in order on all our parts with regards to what is a healthy athletic field and how we can organically provide the best playable surface for our athletes.

Sincerely,

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