



Q&A with Pamela Sherratt

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Why be a sports turf manager?

Q: Why should I enter a career in turfgrass science and what jobs are open to me?

— Bri Schneider, Sports Industry Major, The Ohio State University

A: Before we get into the nitty-gritty about salaries and job prospects I'd like to spend a few minutes talking first about what a career in turf involves and why you should definitely consider it as an option.

Careers in turf management involve working with plants and people, and so the fundamental knowledge needed to be successful in turf includes those related plant science, technology, engineering and math. Turf managers are also required to develop strong leadership skills in communication, project management, and personnel management, since a large part of their job may involve interactions with staff, field users, the general public, and the media.

One of the greatest advantages to working in turf management is that there are plenty of opportunities to work outdoors. If you love being outside, an outdoor work environment can feel fulfilling on many levels and definitely contributes to a high quality of life. Enjoying fresh air and sunshine beats being stuck in a cubicle in an office building any day of the week.

Most of us have experienced the feeling of utter peace and love for the job that occurs as you stand on an athletic field or a golf green at sunrise, just before a major game or tournament. That's a feeling that can't be beat. In addition to the love for outdoors, many people get into a turf career because they love and want to work around sports. A turf manager gets to play a role in success of the team by using his or her working knowledge of the sport to determine what

field conditions are best for the athletes.

Lastly, I would be remiss if I did not state that a big advantage of working in turf is the turf community, the people. Basically, turf people rock. They possess a strong feeling of collegiality, a genuine desire to help young people succeed, and an uncanny ability to work hard but also enjoy life. If you want to work in an industry of genuinely good people, this is it.

Now let's talk about the nitty-gritty.

Looking to the future, job security looks good. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), there were 178,000 first-line supervisors in turf management in 2014 (examples of job titles include Field Manager, Grounds Crew Supervisor, Grounds Foreman etc.). They predict that 39,000 job openings will be created in the next 10 years, with a projected industry growth of 5-8% during that same time period. If we assume that there are 50 university turf programs across the country, each producing 20 graduates per year (this number is high) it equates to 10,000 new turf graduates over the next 10 years, far below the needed 39,000 needed to fulfill industry needs. The bottom line is that there are far more jobs than people right now, and this trend will continue. A much-touted statistic is that more than 90 percent of graduates who earn a degree in sports turf management land a job right out of college. Few industries can rival that success rate.

Looking at salaries, sports turf managers can make \$35,000 to \$100,000 per year depending on where they work. The highest salaries are typically at professional athletic stadiums or large sports complexes. The STMA has salary figures for 2012 posted on their website (STMA.org) and they are currently conducting a 2016 salary survey. Preliminary figures are as follows: A sports turf manager's mean salary is

\$65,300 and the median is \$62,000. An assistant sports turf manager's mean is \$45,149 and median is \$43,000. (Disclaimer: Data provided in 2016 STMA Compensation Survey with 17.5% of members responding; the survey was still open as of this writing.) These figures are similar in nature to those reported by the BLS in 2015. In its most recent survey, the National Association of Colleges and Employers found that the average starting salary for a 2016 graduate with a bachelor's degree is ~\$50,000. Remember that this is the national average, with some occupations much lower (education at 34K) and some much higher (engineering at 64K). Agricultural and natural resource careers were in the middle of that range. What's important to keep in mind if choosing a career in turf is that there is prospect for growth and promotion within the industry is very good. As mentioned earlier, the demand for good people is far going to outweigh the supply.

Lastly, let's look at the types of careers available in the turf industry. They could be listed as: sports turf and grounds management (taking care of sports fields and/or facilities), turf or sod production and sales, product sales and marketing (for example seed and fertilizer), field construction, renovation and consultation services, and academia (teaching, research and consultation). While each one of these careers requires knowledge of turf they vary greatly in nature. My job has a large teaching component; a sports facility manager may have a large part of their day dealing with budgets, staff issues and media communications; while a baseball field manager may be preparing to host an All-Star Game or a Rolling Stones concert. That's also what's great about the industry; each day has new challenges and opportunities to learn and grow. It's never, ever boring, believe me! **ST**