

Web Extra: Less water, less stress, more revenue - Lawn & Landscape

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Five Landscape Pros from across the country share how one product has had a big impact on their business. Hydretain, also sold as LESCO Moisture Manager, is a unique water management technology that functions to convert subsurface water vapor into plant usable water droplets. This process reduces evaporative loss and makes more water available to the plant, resulting in lower water requirements and less stress for both you and your landscapes.

When Customers Simply Don't Water Enough

For Richard Benbow, Owner of the Lawn Doctor Franchise in Southern Wake County, NC, LESCO Moisture Manager provides a profitable solution to improve quality where customers simply won't water enough. He began offering the product as a supplemental application to improve seed germination. "I used the liquid all last year during seeding season. I used it primarily as a supplement, as another billable item, and I charged them \$25 per 1,000 sq. ft. It helps with seeding because I know customers are not going to water as much as they should. The places where I used it, the lawns came in fuller," says Benbow. By improving seed germination with less water, Moisture Manager also gave Benbow the opportunity to offer seeding services on projects he would

not have gone after in the past. “I tend not to push seeding on larger areas, because I know that they won’t water like they’re supposed to, but with Moisture Manager, I felt like they could do it, and the lawns came in much better.”

Benbow was introduced to the granular version of Moisture Manager last December. With increased flexibility, the dry spreader application provides the opportunity for the Lawn Doctor franchise to offer the product as a regular maintenance service. “This year, I am going with the granular because it will be easier. With the granular, I’ll be able to put it out on any lawn. It seems to be a good answer for an area that gets hit or miss rain.” Each application of Moisture Manager lasts for up to three months, so Benbow is expecting to do 2 to 3 applications each year as part of the add-on service. Despite heavy rainfall so far this year, he expects Moisture Manager applications to continue to grow. “We’ve had the wettest spring, but all the sudden now the spigots have turned off and grounds are starting to dry. I’m getting more and more calls about ‘what can I do,’ and my suggestion first and foremost is going to be Moisture Manager because it is going to work and it’s going to be profitable,” says Benbow.

While many companies focus on water savings as the key selling point for Moisture Manager services, Benbow is taking a different approach. He believe that the product will have the biggest impact for customers who aren’t watering enough on a regular basis. “I know that if they haven’t been watering, they are not going to water. Moisture Manager is going to help me help people that won’t give their grass water when they are supposed to. I’m telling them to continue to water as they have been doing and let this fill in so that they’ll have better results.”

Let’s Talk ROI

Amid one of the worst droughts in recorded history, EcoFert, Inc. managed to save one customer nearly \$70,000 in water costs. Established in 1930, Holy Sepulcher is a Catholic cemetery located in Orange, CA. At thirty-three acres, it is the largest of the burial grounds overseen by the Diocese of Orange, and is the final resting place of many Diocesan priests.

Significant water savings at Holy Sepulcher began last year when EcoFert introduced the Diocese to their Water Conservation Program. “We started our Water Conservation Program, using LESCO Moisture Manager, in June of 2015. What we found is from June 2015 through the end of May 2016, when we compare literally year over year, we saved the Diocese \$68,248 dollars in actual water savings. Compared to what they paid us for the service that’s a 380% return on investment.” says Lou Franson, President of EcoFert, Inc.

The actual reduction in water use was approximately 21% or roughly 7.5 million gallons. According to Lou, the reduction in water use resulted in a significant cost savings because of a tiered water cost billing system. “The key here is that they pay on a cost per CCF basis. The prior year they paid an average of \$2.75 per CCF. With our water conservation program, using Moisture Manager, they are on a lower tier because they used less water, they only paid \$1.79 per CCF.”

In addition to the water and cost savings, their quality has also improved. “The most important thing about cemeteries is that it must look good, it must be green. According to Michael Wesner who is the Director of the Diocese of Orange, to quote him ‘It is the best the cemetery has ever looked,’” declared Lou.

For EcoFert, the Water Conservation Program, using LESCO Moisture Manager is an add-on service that compliments their Soil Fertility Program. With the drought in Southern California, it has helped them grow their business by saving water while still keeping parks, sports fields and other areas looking good.

Competitive Advantage

As water availability challenges continue to plague Southern California, many companies have struggled to grow or even sustain business. Drought has made it difficult to create and maintain beautiful turf without increasing water usage and/or cost to the client. In many cases, watering restrictions have made it impossible to use more water, putting limitations on the work that can be done. For Coast Landscaping Inc. the answer to that problem was LESCO Moisture Manager. "We needed to figure out a better solution to not only keep our customers happy with their landscapes and costs while also being responsible with current water restrictions and staying within budgets. Moisture Manager has changed the way we do turf and the results speak for themselves," says Tyler Mason, Controller and Account Manager for Coast Landscaping Inc.

For Mason, the product has done more than just save water, money and landscapes. "Moisture Manager has helped our business grow by offering a solution other companies aren't doing. It gives us a point of differentiation versus other landscape companies. Neighboring communities to what we maintain are noticing the outcomes and are not only asking questions but asking us to bid their projects!" To help customers get started with the product initially, Coast Landscaping Inc. offered them a free trial area. Those small trials have turned into added revenue and new accounts. "They see that it doesn't make sense not to do it. I've actually had management companies of the homeowners associations I work with recommend Moisture Manager on all other properties that they manage. Many of them even hired our company to work their other properties because of our unique offering of Moisture Manager. It's actually gained more jobs for us because the management companies see the value."

Furthermore, the product has provided value by helping Coast Landscaping Inc. continue their enhancement projects. According to Mason, "Moisture Manager has added revenue to our company by allowing us to continue offering enhancement services." Enhancements, such as turf renovations, dethatching, new installs, etc., typically require additional watering. Historically, during times of watering restrictions the requests for enhancement services decline or stop completely. "This product has allowed us to offer more to the client while staying in compliance with California water regulations," declared Mason.

Watering Restrictions? No Problem!

Beyond California, drought and watering restrictions present a challenge for many landscape companies. For Seaman's Lawn and Landscape, that challenge has become a profitable opportunity. Located in North Texas, Seaman's is a full service landscape company that started offering Hydretain several years ago. "Hydretain has given our customers the ability to have a green, healthy yard with minimal amount of watering. It is a great upsell product that maintains a healthy lawn despite watering restrictions," says Erik Seaman, Co-owner and Manager of the Fertilization Division. "With the droughts here, you can have a lot of rain and then it will stop for the rest of the year. We can go 6-7 months without rain, and this product really helps."

The company, which has been in business for over 20 years, has built a great reputation in the Dallas area. Hydretain is helping to maintain that reputation through recurrent drought and year-round watering restrictions. "When you look at a neighborhood and your customer's yards are green when the rest of them are wilting and

yellowing out, that has the greatest impact,” says Erik. “When your customer is watering less and their yard is green, it makes them very happy.” In an area where watering restrictions are the new norm, many homeowners struggle to simply maintain quality. Through their Hydretain service, Seaman’s is helping customers keep green yards and save money on their water bill. “We’ve been able to keep reducing watering and keep the lawns solid green and healthy while the neighbors lawns are totally yellowing out. The 50% reduction in watering is a reality here. We’ve been able to save people a ton of money on their water bill and still get great results on the turf. That has been the biggest benefit of Hydretain.” The service has even helped them gain new customers, touts Erik, “when you can only water once or twice a week, Hydretain helps keep the customers’ lawns looking like they are cheating. Neighbors wonder what they are doing, and they talk.” Word of mouth is definitely working for Seaman’s. The company doesn’t advertise and can barely keep up with their demand.

Beyond the direct benefits, Erik noted that Hydretain has had a positive impact on other aspects of their business. “It also helps our other treatments. When the lawns are burning up and yellowing out customers will want to skip treatments. With Hydretain it helps keep the grass green with the limited amount of watering that we can do here.” In addition to turf maintenance, the company has used Hydretain to improve seed germination and seasonal color. “When we do overseed, we put Hydretain down, and we’ve had great results. It helps it come up quicker. With the water restrictions we are still able to get seed to germinate and come up really well,” says Erik. “It helps with our seasonal color too. Flowers can really take a beating with lack of water. It helps keep our seasonal color healthy when we can only water twice a week. It keeps the plants from wilting, improves color and helps with establishment.”

For Seaman’s Hydretain has become part of their yearly service offering. “We get our customers on a contract for the year and offer the service 2 or 3 times depending on the amount of rainfall that we get.” According to Erik, consistency is key, “the magic is being able to follow-up and being on a program where you do it not just once. It seems to get better when you follow-up and do treatments 2 or 3 times each year.”

Stress-Free Installs

For Matt Parsons, President of Parsons Landscape Services, Inc. in Ft. Myers, FL, water management used to be a big challenge for small landscape repairs or patch installations. The issue is trying to get enough water on the new install without overwatering the existing turf. “The problem that you run into in those application is you have an irrigation zone that may cover most of the front yard, but let’s say you are only putting in a few pieces of sod. If you run the irrigation enough to water those few pieces, you end up over watering the rest of the lawn,” says Parsons. “We are cautious about how much water we use because of all the issues you get related to over watering such as fungus, and increased insect activity. We started using LESCO Moisture Manager in those applications and it made it big difference on how well the grass performed and rooted in, it seemed to reduce the stress from lack of water.”

Beyond the benefits for turf, Parsons has also experienced significant labor savings for shrubs and other landscape installations. When replacing a few plants throughout a community, it is not always practical or possible to run an irrigation system with the frequency needed to for establishment. Parsons uses Moisture Manager in those scenarios to reduce watering needs. “There is a cost savings benefit for us, because it will limit the need for us to go out and hand water,” claims Parsons. “If we are in a dry area and doing a new landscape job, Moisture Manager is a great tool in our arsenal to be able to get the proper water to those

plants.”

In most cases, Parsons does not charge for the product application. The cost savings and reputation building benefits provide enough value to justify the service. “We are using it mostly for the cost savings related to not having to go back to properties with problems. The shrubs are able to establish with less hand watering. We’ve also seen a reduction in plant mortality, which is good because half the stuff is under warranty.” For new sod installs Parson’s states that the product will offer an advantage, particularly when temperatures are high. “When temperatures are above or close to 90 degrees and humidity levels are low, it sucks the moisture out of the turf. It is going to save you money because inevitably the customer is going to call you up and tell you that you put down bad grass and you need to replace it. Moisture Manager is going to resolve that issue and there is a cost savings from that.”

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