



## Managing costs on the golf course

For any turf and training related queries, talk to the team at NZ Sports Turf Institute.

The restrictions placed on businesses by government due to the Covid - 19 pandemic have been rapid and severe. Almost all businesses have lost revenue while costs continue, the government is providing limited financial aid targeted at retaining staff within organisations and the promise of future tax breaks.

Fortunately, golf turf has been granted an exemption for essential maintenance, however revenue is down due to no green fees, food and beverage, functions, or retail trading. Additionally, for many golf clubs charity revenue sources are unlikely to be available until the last part of the year (at the earliest). It is therefore reasonable to expect that Turf Managers will be asked to look at cost savings, so where do we look and what can we realistically alter?

First and foremost, focus on the important areas and essential tasks only during restrictions. The detail work can recommence once facilities are fully operational and receiving income. Essential tasks include mowing of greens, tees, fairways and finally rough. Rough is listed last as there is the potential to raise the height and maintain infrequently while there is no play. Application of curative fungicides and fertiliser to maintain turf health are also essential but with reduced playing pressure fertiliser inputs for turf wear recovery can be reduced or even avoided.

Non essential items until play resumes are bunker raking/ edging, pattern mowing and graduated heights of cut.



Note: At the time of writing, whether golf can continue under Category 3 lockdown and specific criteria for this were yet to be confirmed.

Course Superintendents can expect to be asked to find cost savings across the operation. The 17 day maintenance shut down followed by a further period of limited maintenance should provide you with plenty of “intelligence” in relation to this. You will have been able to observe what you got with reduced maintenance inputs – reflect on that and you should be able to identify numerous ways in which savings can be made.

In that context, look at the budget line by line - be critical in your thinking, involve others in the management team and ask the following questions:

1. Is every item required? If you have to think of a way to justify the expenditure it is probably not essential.
2. Are there items that can be deferred? For example:
  - Tree work (where safety is not compromised)
  - Renovation, deferring until spring or even autumn 2021 will not have lasting impacts on the course
  - Construction, defer capital works at your venue
  - Weed control when play resumes golfers will be eager to play and are not likely to be critical of some weeds present on the course.
  - Equipment replacement, if these cannot be deferred consider finance agreements rather than outright purchase.
3. Ask the question is the present standard of course presentation actually achievable – do we have to manage expectations in light of revised finances? For example, if the club has shed some staff, then the original maintenance standards (mowing frequencies etc) may no longer be realistic anymore.
4. Look closely at mowing operations; can heights of cut be raised, and frequency of mowing reduced? (think about what you had after 17 days with no maintenance). This can provide fuel and fertiliser savings. Can more efficient equipment be used? Such as substituting a triplex mower for walk behind mowers or rotary mowing in some areas currently cut with reels.
5. Are there more cost-effective product lines that will do the same job? Keep in mind that the supply of some internationally manufactured products may be disrupted for many months to come.

Look at your current supplier agreements, do not be afraid to ask for discounts from existing suppliers. Shop for the best price, it is convenient to have a single supplier but not always the best financially; use the time available while completing essential maintenance only to test the market.

It is crucial to look closely at your operation - communicate clearly with your management team on the impacts of changes and the savings that can be made. It will be better to plan for restrictions early on rather than having to make financial cuts without advance planning.