

## [Organic Turf Programs Cost Less than Chemical Programs, Report Shows](#)

(Beyond Pesticides, March 23, 2010) On March 22, 2010 the environmental health group Grassroots Environmental Education released [a report](#) comparing the relative costs of maintaining a typical high school football field using a chemical-intensive program and a natural (organic) program over a five-year period. The report, prepared for members of the New York State legislature, concludes that the annual cost of maintaining a field using natural products and techniques can be as much as 25% lower than the cost of conventional programs using chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

“It can take a few seasons to undo the damage caused by chemical management programs, revitalize the soil biology and let nature do its work,” says the report’s principal author, Charles “Chip” Osborne, a nationally-recognized natural turf expert and Beyond Pesticides board member who serves as a consultant to many New York school districts. “But once we get the soil biology working for us, we can see some dramatic and significant cost reductions fairly quickly.”

The emerging science that links exposure to turf pesticides with human health problems, including potential interference with normal brain development in children, has increased the demand for non-chemical turf management solutions for schools, and has spurred lawmakers in Albany to consider legislation to ban the use of chemical pesticides on school grounds. One obstacle commonly cited by chemical management proponents is the purported higher cost of a natural turf program.

“The natural turf industry has come a long way in the past few years with a new generation of products and technologies that have reduced costs and improved outcomes,” says Doug Wood, Associate Director of Grassroots and the report’s co-author. “We felt it was time to put an end to this myth that parents and school officials need to choose between children’s health and increased maintenance costs. Now the choice for organics is clear.”

Bolstering the cause for proponents of natural turf care, a new environmental survey of schools in suburban Westchester County reveals that 88% of the school systems in the county currently maintain their grounds without pesticides. This year on Long Island, 31 school districts joined together in a cooperative bid for natural turf maintenance services.

“We’ve all known the dangers of pesticides for a long time, but until now, there hasn’t been a clear choice for schools facing economic challenges,” says Assemblyman Steve Englebright, co-sponsor of the legislation. “Now, thanks to cutting-edge technology and good old-fashioned biology, we can accomplish both goals at the same time. This is great news for schools across the state.”

The report includes cost factors for fertilization, aeration, over-seeding and irrigation for both programs. The conventional program includes additional costs for purchasing and applying typical herbicides and insecticides, while the natural program includes costs for compost topdressing and natural soil amendments. Costs for the natural program are slightly higher in the first two years of the comparative report, and then drop significantly in years three and beyond.

Chip Osborne will be speaking at [Greening the Community](#), the 28th National Pesticide Forum, to be held April 9-10 in Cleveland, OH. Creating pesticide-free lawns, parks, playing fields, gardens and other community spaces is a central theme of conference. Registration starts at \$25. Register online or call Beyond Pesticides for more information, 202-543-5450.

For more information on organic lawns and landscapes, see the Beyond Pesticides [program page](#).

***Take action on a related lawn care issue:*** Sign the petition to stop Major League Baseball for promoting chemical-intensive lawn care management practices through a partnership with the Scotts Company. See [background and petition](#).