

The Grass Is Even “Greener” When It Comes to Upton’s Athletic Fields

By Michelle Sanford, Staff Reporter, *The Upton & Mendon Town Crier*

Green with envy is the way the Upton Parks Department staff might describe the town’s sports fields these days. That’s because thanks to Gary Harper and John Johnson of the Parks Department, Upton’s athletic fields are going green and, as a bonus, saving money.

According to Highway Supervisor John Johnson, who also oversees the Parks Department, last year he asked Harper to investigate the use of Agresoil compost for the town’s sports fields to determine if its use would be more beneficial than using the chemical fertilizers the Department had been using in the past.

In addition to his two years working for the Upton Parks Department, Harper’s prior occupations gave him some first-rate experience with the task at hand. “I have a background in golf course maintenance,” said Harper, who previously worked for the Hopedale Country Club and the Pleasant Valley Country Club in Sutton.

Through his research and prior knowledge of turf surfaces, it became evident to Harper that the benefits of using the Agresoil Compost were substantial and therefore recommended using it on the town’s athletic fields.

Agresoil Compost is typically made up of manures, yard wastes, and municipal biosolids. As a result, the nutrients in the compost are in the organic form and therefore deemed environmentally friendly. Better still is the fact that by using the compost, the utilization of chemical fertilizers has been cut down nearly 50 percent. However, according to Harper, the West River Field is completely organic. Applying the compost as topdressing on the fields has helped improve the soil structure and reduce irrigation and weeds, among other things.

The Agresoil Compost is made by Agresource, Inc., a company located in Amesbury, but the actual spreading of it is done in house. This is the second year the Parks Departments has used the compost and a number of residents have commented to Johnson and Harper about how good the sports fields look.

“People who use the fields regularly have told me how much better they look,” said Johnson. The use of the compost is also helping to save money because it is used less often than traditional fertilizers.

Although Harper did not indicate exactly how much money is being saved, he said it was significant, which in turn has helped the Parks Department. “For the past several years, our budget has been level funded,” said Johnson. “So this has helped a great deal.”

Because the use of the compost has proven to be a success on the athletic fields, Harper and Johnson would now like to see it used on a number of other areas in town that the Parks Department oversees, including the police and fire departments’ properties, the library, and the cemetery.