State budget includes new turfgrass facility for UGA-Griffin

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For decades, University of Georgia scientists in Griffin, Tifton and Athens have co-authored state-of-the-art turfgrass research. Today’s researchers still work in the same labs where modern turfgrass science started in the 1950s.

Those legacy labs and greenhouses will soon get much-needed renovations. Georgia’s fiscal year 2015 budget includes $11.5 million for the improvement of UGA’s turfgrass teaching, research and Extension facilities across the state.

The funds will build a new turfgrass research facility on the UGA College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences’ campus in Griffin. The new facility will include a turfgrass research and education building, greenhouses and associated support offices and work spaces.

This project will continue the Griffin Campus’ tradition of cutting-edge turfgrass research, attracting world-class researchers and educators, graduate students, cooperators and industry,” said UGA Extension turfgrass specialist Clint Waltz, who is based in Griffin. “The UGA Turf Team is humbled by the industry’s support of our programs and appreciates all their efforts to garner funding for these facilities enhancements.”

Georgia’s turfgrass and related industries contribute more than $7.8 billion annually to the economy and provide 85,000 full- and part-time jobs. Turfgrass is one of Georgia’s top crops and provides 17 percent of the state’s farm gate value — $117 million.

Waltz credits the funding to the support of the Georgia Urban Ag Council and UGA’s other green industry partners.

“The urban ag industry has been a longtime supporter of Georgia’s turfgrass and horticulture education and research programs—and now Georgia’s legislators recognize the economic value of these industries bring to Georgia,” said Mary Kay Woodworth, executive director of the council.

“World-renowned research and testing is accomplished at these UGA facilities and in the laboratories — and all are woefully outdated,” Woodworth said. “In order to continue to attract the best and brightest researchers and experts, we need state-of-the-art educational and research facilities. This funding will provide what we need to not only attract, but retain world-class turfgrass and horticulture experts.”

On the main UGA campus in Athens, the budget will fund a greenhouse, classrooms and new research field plots. Collectively, these new additions will become the college’s Athens Turfgrass Research and Education Center. The Tifton campus will see a new greenhouse complex.

For more on turfgrass teaching, research and Extension programs at UGA, visit www.georgiaturf.com.