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Aiming for a Sustainable Golf Industry: GreenActivator Creates Competition on the Course

For the past 100 years, university research has driven agribusiness innovation by enhancing agricultural yields through innovation and science.¹ Agricultural businesses have understood the power of harnessing this science to aggressively improve their crop yields and profits.² However, the contributions of the agriculture industry to climate change were well documented and estimated in 2021 to be about 10.6 percent of all greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the United States.³ Adapting to a changing climate and lessening agribusinesses' GHG contributions by reducing the use of environmentally damaging chemicals became drivers of the research agenda.⁴

Several startup companies were founded by university researchers with the purpose of commercializing their scientific findings to significantly reduce the use of herbicides, pesticides, fungicides, and fertilizers in agribusiness while also making crops more resistant to high drought, intense heat, and excessive rainfall.⁵ In doing so, the scientists aimed to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and other GHGs.⁶ The emissions contributed to intensity, unpredictability, instability, and the extreme nature of weather events in an increasingly warmer climate.⁷

Some of these startup companies understood that the turfgrass industry was among those negatively affected by climate change. They recognized that creating an agile and resilient agricultural system—through crop growing techniques that unleashed the natural power of plants—also created an opportunity for agribusiness companies to diversify. They could expand their market by addressing turfgrass needs for such popular outdoor sports as soccer, field hockey, football, and golf.

In the sport of golf in particular, chemical use had extremely negative effects on natural ecosystems and water tables. With its immense acreage of greens and fairways, golf was being scrutinized for adverse environmental impact and stress on water resources. For example, a protest by the climate activist group Extinction Rebellion interrupted a pivotal moment on the 18th green of the final round of the Travelers Championship in 2024. Protestors wearing T-shirts with the message “No Golf on a Dead Planet” stormed the green as tournament leaders Scottie Scheffler and Tom Kim were putting for the victory (see **Figure 1**).⁸ The images capturing the protest were carried by many major media outlets around the world.

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