

Today golf faces significant challenges that will shape its future

A story of success – Competence, Capital and Cooperation

A STERF and ITRI perspective



Maria Strandberg STERF
FEGGA conference
Faro, Portugal March 11-12 2026

New knowledge and New tools

What you learned three or four years ago might not be relevant today!



Internationally important areas and programmes

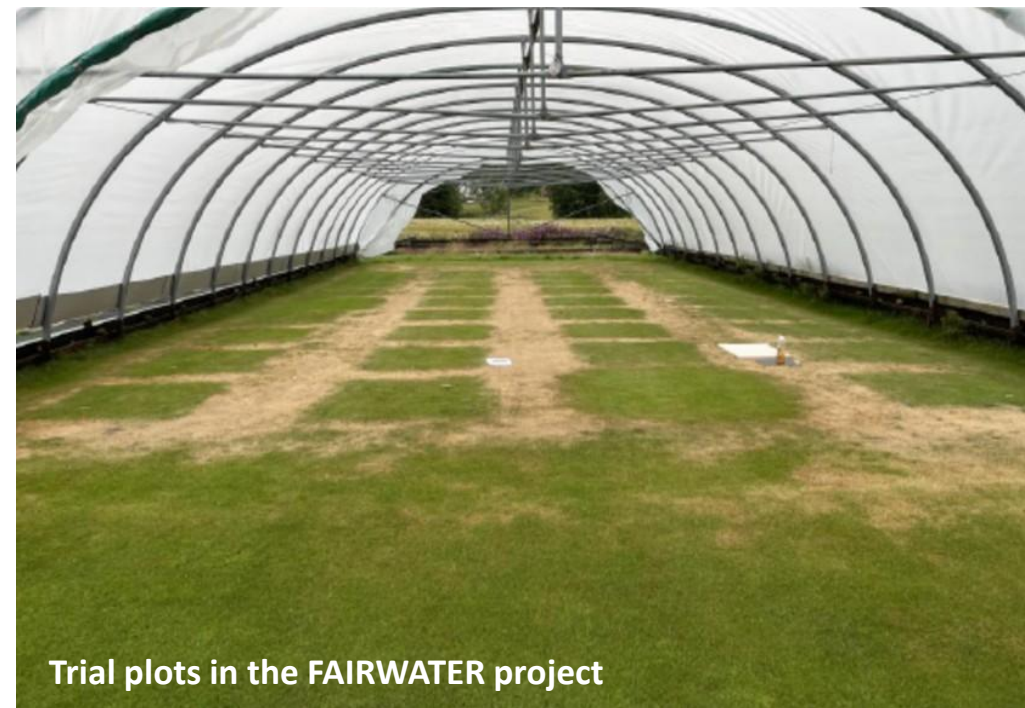


STERF supports R&D based on these programmes, and the activities of STERF are intended to lead to improvements in the quality of golf courses and turfgrass areas, as well as economic and environmental gains for the industry and society as a whole.

Sustainable water management

FAIR-WATER I and II: Towards better drought resistance and reduced water consumption on golf course fairways

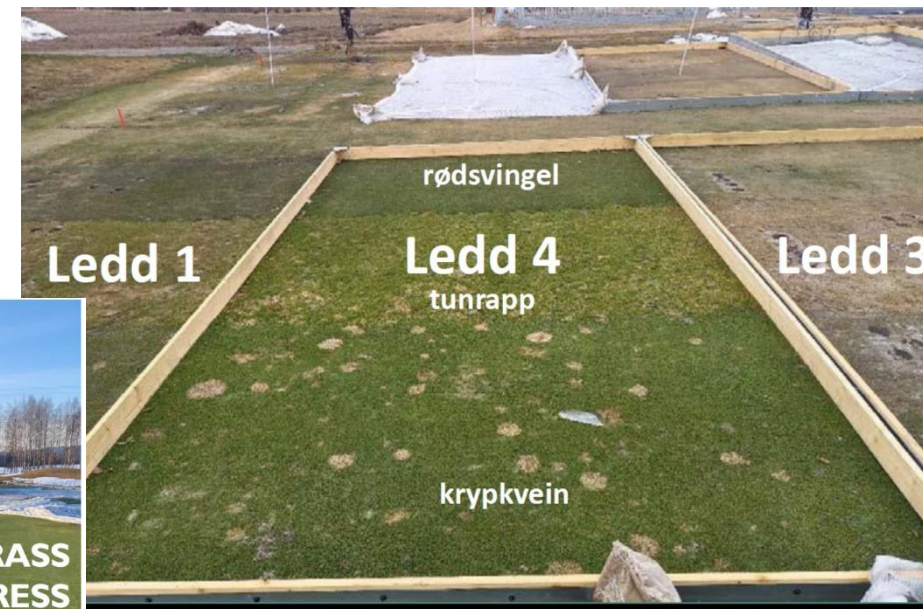
- FAIRWATER I:
 - a) Screening for drought-tolerant species and varieties
 - b) testing of soil surfactants to improve grass quality and
 - c) combine a and b for optimal fairway performance
- Fairwater II:
 - a) Large-scale evaluations of mechanical treatment and selected surfactants to improve drought resistance on fairways
 - b) Use of brackish and effluent water for turfgrass irrigation
- Partners: NIBIO, Osnabruck University of Applied Sciences, iNova Green Germany, Golf courses in Northern Europe
- A Golf Course 2030 project
- Total funding: €440 000



Prevent and repair damages caused by ice cover and melting water

ICE-BREAKER: Reducing the agronomic and economic impact of ice damage on golf courses

- Costs caused by ice cover: €50 – 60 000 per year and golf club
- Result presented as: Final report, ten up-dated fact sheets, popular scientific articles, demonstration videos, new up-dated handbook
- Partners: NIBIO, Norway; RCN Norway; NGF; SGF; University of Massachusetts; University of Minnesota; Nordic golf clubs.
- Total funding for four years: STERF €150 000
RCN €440 000 and Match-funding €330 000



STERF Call for proposals - Project period 2026-2028

Four new projects

- SCANGREEN: Turfgrass species and varieties for integrated pest management of Scandinavian putting greens 2027-2030
- AURORA GREEN: Managing turfgrass photoinhibition in the northern light
- Exploring Alternatives to Quartz-Based Sands in Golf Course Management.
- H2Mow: Next steps to drought resistant fairways with robotic mowing.

Review and decision:

- STERF has received 15 proposals requesting for more than €2 500 000
- Comprehensive review process – Researchers, consultants and greenkeepers
- Decision made by STERF board December 2025, equals €650 000 for four years



Activities to celebrate STERF's 20th anniversary

- Three international jubilee webinars – autumn 2026:
 - Sustainable water management based on the FAIR-WATER project – STERF and GC2030
 - Strategies to improve the sustainable management of dollarspot – STERF and ITRI
 - Effects, positive and negative, of robotic mowers in golf course maintenance
- Open jubilee call for proposals – announced April/May 2026
- Popular scientific articles focusing on core research projects and results.



STERF Practical advice and recommendations available for free

42 fact sheets within IPM,
Winter stress management, Biodiversity

15 Handbooks
20-30 Demonstration videos

Popular scientific articles 2025
- 46 new articles

This collage features several Sterf publications. At the top left is a fact sheet titled 'FAKTABLAD - Integrerat växtskydd' (Fact Sheet - Integrated Pest Management) with the subtitle 'Mekanisk skötsel för att minimera angrepp av skadedörare på golfbanan' (Mechanical maintenance to minimize damage from pests on the golf course). Below it is another fact sheet titled 'Mekanisk skötsel' (Mechanical maintenance). To the right is a handbook titled 'HANDBOOK TURF GRASS WINTER SURVIVAL' with the subtitle 'WINTER PROTECTIVE COVERS Usage of wraps to improve winter survival of golf greens'. Below that is a fact sheet titled 'FACT SHEET - Multifunctionality & Biodiversity' with the subtitle 'From dense swards to biodiverse roughs - Methods to diversify existing rough areas'. At the bottom right of the collage is a 'Summary' section. The Sterf logo is visible at the bottom of the collage.

This block contains two handbooks. The top one is 'PRECISION FERTILISATION - From theory to practice UPDATE 2021', featuring a cover image of a golfer on a green. The bottom one is 'TURFGRASS WINTER STRESS MANAGEMENT Golf course managers' handbook UPDATED 2025', featuring a cover image of a winter landscape with snow. Both handbooks have the Sterf logo at the bottom.

This block contains two popular scientific articles. The left article is 'FAIR WATER II: Focus on irrigation with brackish or recycled water and improved drought resistance by the combination of thatch control, deep aeration and use of soil surfactants', featuring a cover image of a golf course with a water body. The right article is 'Robotic mowing on fairway and semi-rough: Less diseases but more white clover', featuring a cover image of a golf course. Both articles have the Sterf logo at the bottom.

International Turfgrass Research Initiative (ITRI)

A cooperative effort by the STERF, R&A, and USGA

- Capital - Joint research funding
- Competence - The best expertise in all countries
- Big enough volume of research projects to have impact
- Efficient communication of research results



Summary of proposals and decisions

25 pre-proposals requested more than € 6.6 million



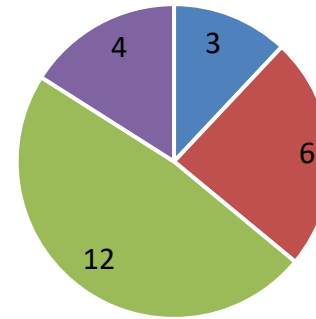
9 proposals advanced to the full-proposal stage



3 projects will be funded with nearly € 800,000 from 2026-2028

www.sterf.org

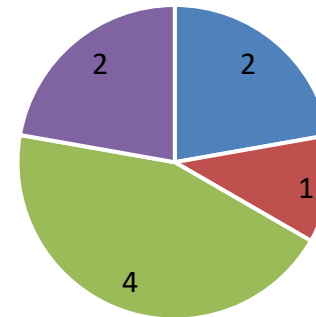
Pre-proposal stage



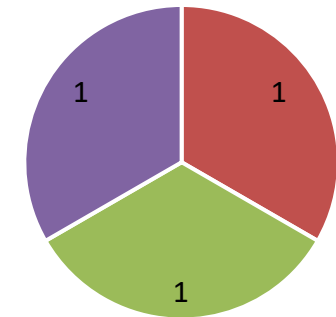
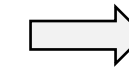
- Biodiversity and Landscape Perspective
- Climate
- Integrated Pest Management
- Water Conservation



Full-proposal stage



Projects selected



Integrating alternative strategies to improve the sustainable management of dollar spot

Paul Koch, University of Wisconsin

This project brings together an experienced team of researchers from the US, UK, Norway, and Germany with the overall goal of developing more sustainable dollar spot management strategies.



Leveraging Satellite Data for Water Conservation on Golf Course Fairways

Qiyu Zhou North Carolina State University,

By using new technologies for developing soil moisture maps this project will enable precision irrigation, and help to conserve water, reduce costs, and support sustainable turfgrass management worldwide



Pathways to a climate-positive future for golf

Robert Kempster, NIBIO

This project will help us to understand the carbon balance in turfgrass management globally and the results will be able to guide making climate-smart decision across the global golf industry.



The role of greenkeeper organisations

- Take part in co-creating research questions, knowledge and solutions
- Encourage members to host research trials on golf courses
- Provide project match-funding, in-kind and money
- Support and stimulate implementation of new knowledge
- Make research results easily accessible to the end-users through your communication channels
- Communicate the importance of staying up to date with the latest research and new knowledge
- Strengthen the profession by being at the forefront



Research agenda of the future

Sustainable golf course management, ecosystem services and effects of climate change

