

# Mowing's Profound Impact on Our Industry



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The phenomenal growth of commercial mowing is the biggest change I've seen in the contractor market in the 30 years that I have been reporting on the industry. Let me clarify what I mean by the terms "phenomenal growth" and "commercial mowing".

By commercial mowing I mean mowing for money by companies or individuals that identify themselves, even if loosely, as professionals. The properties they mow can be residential, commercial, institutional, municipal, industrial or highway. By phenomenal growth, I mean the number of companies and individuals flooding into the commercial mowing business these last 30 years and (from observation and anecdotal evidence) continuing to do so.

The mowing segment of the industry seems to have experienced at least three major growth spurts since I began reporting on the industry in 1984. I've identified these high-growth periods as the late 1980s, the mid-1990s until 9/11, and the years immediately before the 2008-2009 recession.

But, how about the number of people or companies that generate at least some of their revenue by mowing?

As far as I can determine, there is no precise number for "professional cutters" in the United States. I think it is safe to say, however, that contract mowing is our industry's largest and busiest segment. It's anybody's guess how many of the more than 386,000 U.S. landscape companies claimed by PLANET on its website mow for money. My guess is that a majority of these companies cut grass.

There are several compelling reasons why professional mowing has grown so large during the last generation or two. On the residential side, reasons include the aging U.S. population and the relative affluence of Baby Boomers, at least compared to previous generations. Factors such as curb appeal, rents

and occupancy rates drive mowing on commercial and retail sites.

Encouragingly, the numbers say that commercial mowing is on the upswing again. Sales of commercial mowers dipped to fewer than 110,000 units at the height of the recent recession but grew to about 160,000 units in 2013. Kohler, which manufactures commercial engines for these units, projects sales increasing an average of 4.1 percent until 2018, at least.

While mowing is not a glamorous activity-especially compared to the incredible landscapes that we design and provide our customers-consider how important it is to the financial health of our companies and to the size and importance of our industry.

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