



TAKE IT SLOW Christina Kobland sits on her invention, a slow-growing grass named FlightTurf. PHOTO: ADAM FINEK/IM

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atmosphere to create Treeswax. "There's a lot of talk out there about restoration this, tree-planting that, but first and foremost we need to be protecting existing forests. It takes centuries of ecological succession to create a forest."

FLIGHTTURF/LYME X

<https://flightturf.com/>
Christina Kobland's love of wildlife inspired her to develop FlightTurf, a groundcover that most animals would stay away from. The conservationist, who also co-owns a company called Native Return, LLC, is aware of the irony. "I started my business to convince landholders to introduce native plants, to regrow

biodiversity," she says, "and then with FlightTurf, there you're using certain grasses that don't attract wildlife, and in that way, the wildlife stays away."

FlightTurf is a low-growth (and low-maintenance) turfgrass to be grown as a monoculture in areas that are high-risk or incompatible to wildlife. Since it's not a food source, it discourages grazing animals like deer and Canada geese from congregating where they could endanger humans or themselves. Kobland noticed the need for this counterintuitive eco-product while working on an assignment for the Philadelphia Division of Aviation to create a native meadow on land outside its runways.

Her attention quickly turned toward the expansive airfields there. "You've heard of bird strikes at airports," she says. "Wildlife is naturally attracted to the giant open spaces of airfields. The grasses commonly planted, as well as the volunteer weeds, are a food source. Groundskeepers not only mow the fields 24/7, but they even bring in sharpshooters to kill the wildlife."

Troubled by this violence, Kobland deployed her sweeping knowledge of grasses in a way she had never imagined she would. "One thing led to another. I ended up doing research on the airfield for three years, and I patented my seed mix," she says.

The environmental benefits of FlightTurf are manifold. "It inherently requires less water," she explains, "because it stays short—doesn't need mowing—and it develops very deep root systems, so it reaches its old age quicker and sustains itself with the deep root systems."

Kobland went on to patent five different uses and mixes of slow-growing grass. Today FlightTurf can be found not only at many airports but also under solar panel fields across the country. Though it costs slightly more than traditional turfgrass, the expense is offset by substantial savings on mowing and maintenance (about \$800 per acre)—and, of course, animal lives.

What about private landowners who are just tired of mowing their lawns? Or those who long for sustainable green grass in the drought-ridden western states? Kobland is excited to share LymeX, an identical product available in smaller quantities. "The reason we got that going," she says, "is the Bay Area Lyme Foundation had called me a number of years ago. They had heard that our product deters animals like deer that carry the ticks that cause Lyme disease." She suggested that Kobland market LymeX to homeowners to help prevent the disease.

As for Kobland's current homebase in Santa Cruz, the decision to move here after decades

in Pennsylvania was motivated primarily by her desire to be closer to her family. "Because we sell all across the United States, we can really be located anywhere," she says. "But interestingly enough," she adds, "a local landscaper had heard of us, and they did seed several acres of the FlightTurf on a property in Santa Cruz, and they told us recently it's done very well ... so we know it thrives here."

454 BAGS/GIFFEN SUPPLY

<https://454bags.com/>
As TJ Howe describes his work over the phone, the chatter of farm animals can be heard in the background. "Sorry," he says, laughing. "I'm out with my goats and my chickens."

The interruption is fitting. In Salinas and Aptos, Howe has spent the past decade developing bioplastics specific to agriculture. Both of his companies, 454 Bags and Giffen Supply, launched this year.

Howe's background is in the cannabis industry, which generates over 300 million pounds of plastic waste annually. He was disturbed by this statistic, as well as the added worry surrounding microplastics leaching into his cannabis itself. 454 Bags provides a full array of eco-friendly post-harvest options for growers, from vacuum bags to tote liners to storage bags.

Howe has also been pushing forward with Giffen Supply, aimed at reversing the 800 million pounds of plastic waste—typically nylon, one of the least recyclable plastics—that the agriculture industry generates annually.

He has worked to improve upon existing corn-based bioplastics (PLAs—think the thin green trash bags one can buy at the grocery store) that are widely available but not necessarily as great as they sound. "A PLA bioplastic is biodegradable in a commercial composter," he says. "They're better than plastic, but still they don't break down very quickly when they end up in the landfill."

"Our goal with everything has been to develop all our bioplastic products to be landfill biodegradable