Scott MacCallum discovers what is behind the recent success of BIGGA Gold Key Supporter, Syngenta.

Syngenta may be a young company – having been formed in 2000 and not breaking into the UK golf market until 2005 - but in those six years many Course Managers have come to rely heavily on the products that it has developed and services that it provides.

With Primo Maxx, Rescue, Banner Maxx, Instrata and Medal-lion TL among the big hitters in its portfolio along with the industry standard Heritage Maxx, and back up services like the GreenCast website, innovative nozzle application technology and environmental initiatives, the days before their existence already seem like a distant memory to many grateful turf professionals.

But behind the company is a long history and pedigree with its roots in ICI, Zeneca and Novartis.

“We have always seen ourselves as solution providers, rather than just selling a product. We work hard to produce good products, provide the after sales care and build relationships with our customers,” explained Syngenta’s Rod Burke, as we talked at Marriott Hanbury Manor Hotel and Country Club, along with one of those customers, Course Manager, Andrew Howarth.

“That’s the Syngenta way, and how the company operates in all of its markets. We are never in a situation where we just put a product out and walk away. It doesn’t work like that, and it also helps us because we get feedback from the customer about where we need to go and the new products we need to research,” explained Rod.

Much of that turf research work is carried out at Stein, in Switzerland, a vast complex containing laboratories, greenhouses and climate chambers. It even has breeding stations for pests and diseases, to replicate golf course problems in test conditions. No stone is left unturned in the unwavering ambition to produce new products.

In the UK, the company also has a base at Jealott’s Hill, near Reading, where testing of new active ingredients is carried out in mind boggling numbers, aimed at uncovering those which should be put forward for further development work as potential new products.

It all goes to explain the huge investment required to create a new product– estimates place it at anything up to £200 million to develop a new active ingredient and bring it to the market. “That includes meeting all the various and demanding regulatory requirements which are set by individual countries or regions. Product development can take a decade or more from the first discovery through to market. Once the development work has been completed it still takes around two years to go through the regulation process in the UK and in other countries like Spain, up to a further five years. It is a huge amount of work,” explained Rod.

But that effort is appreciated by people like Andrew, at Hanbury Manor, who has used Syngenta products almost as long as they have been available in the UK, and who provided one of the trial sites for the recently-launched Medal-lion TL, a contact+ fungicide, which offers protection from fusarium.

Such was his confidence in the
ensuring that products are used at the right time for best effect and creating savings overall.”

It is a view that is endorsed by Andrew:

“We very much operate on a preventative basis but we aim to be specific. It’s certainly not a scatter gun approach and so tools like GreenCast are great. You might think in your own mind that it is the right day to go ahead with an application but now you then check with GreenCast which can confirm if you are right,” said Andrew, who admits to visiting the site at least once a day.

“As greenkeepers we are all obsessed with the weather so it’s great to have somewhere to go which has so much useful information.”

Andrew was also one of the first to use the growth regulator, Primo Maxx, which perhaps more than any other has left its mark on the industry in the last 10 years.

“I started using Primo Maxx in 2007 and believe I was in the first group of people to do so. It has made a huge difference in terms of quality of surface, as well as savings in manpower as a result of the growth regulator element of it.”

“I have to say that it has done everything that we wanted it to do and we’ve got more out of it the more we have used it and learnt about it,” explained Andrew, for whom quality at such a high profile golfing venue is of prime importance.

Indeed, like so many of his fellow users, Andrew has become more sophisticated in his use of Primo Maxx, which is now an integral part of the turf management routine.

Syngenta has done a significant amount of research aimed at putting together a persuasive case for golf clubs to invest in turf management - clearly demonstrating the benefits and value created by new agronomic advice and innovative research based practices to successfully establish and manage specific wildflower mixtures designed to benefit pollinators to increase the attractiveness of courses for insects and players.

Participants are provided with agronomic advice and innovative research based practices to successfully establish and manage specific wildflower mixtures designed to benefit pollinators and improve course playability.

As a Gold Key Supporter of BIGGA since 2008 Syngenta supports the Association’s Education and Development Fund, which was set up to offer support and tools for BIGGA members.

“We see the professional development of BIGGA members as being extremely beneficial to the industry,” added Rod.

“We increasingly find that we are dealing with professionals of the quality of Andrew, who appreciate what we are bringing to the market place in terms of high performance products, integrated solutions and services and comprehensive support.”