



Silent Minority

GREEN SIDE UP
By JOEL JACKSON

You always hear about the Silent Majority. Who are they? Well they are most middle Americans who work hard for a living, pay taxes, strive for success (or at least survival) and who are impressed more by actions or real people than the rhetoric of politicians and celebrities espousing agendas instead of common sense.

The majority, when polled time and again on the issues, generally favor a moderate, common-sense approach that highlights fairness and the best science available on contentious issues blasted all over the front pages of newspapers and is the topic of media pundits who must talk about something to fill the hours on the nonstop cable news shows.

Within this framework are the vocal minority who dominate the headlines and pound us incessantly with "the sky is falling" point of view on everything from Iraq, global warming and back-yard fertilizer. Also within this universe is the Silent Minority, also known as golfers. These folks only make up 10 percent of the population, but I suspect the numbers will grow as the Boomer generation retires and takes up the game.

Meanwhile they remain clueless about what really goes on their golf course – good or bad. As most of us know, the majority of golf course superintendents do the right thing when it comes to applying nutrients and pesticides and the result is not massive amounts of leaching or runoff as often casually and erroneously stated and reported in the media. Words like "could," "might," and "maybe" are lost in the rhetoric and the message becomes fertilizers pollute our waters. Ban them and save the world.

Lost is the science, the reason and reality. Anti-chemical, anti-mankind activists preach nature is supreme and blame man for all the bad things that happen. Even acts of God are now the result of man's burning of fossil fuels. Well it's time that people who benefit from having well conditioned golf courses step up and be heard. Here's what I've learned from attending endless meetings on the crises at hand:

- Most local officials still don't know there are BMPs for lawn care and golf courses. I did mail 67 copies of the Green Industries BMP manual (one to every county chairman or manager or mayor, whatever the title). They will also be getting a copy of the Golf BMP manual once it's finished printing.
- Even people within our green industries don't know we have BMP manuals. IFAS has BMP training classes available. Do yourself a favor and take one.
- Most superintendents haven't brought up the subject of fertilizer ordinances to their owners or club members. What are you waiting for? Tell them what you do and rebut all the nonsense they read in the local paper. Ask for their help. It's their golf course.
- Most of these ordinances and proposed bans are generated by one commissioner who has a mission and 19 angry people.

If we can't amass scores of people to attend a commission meeting and calmly say a few simple words – "stewardship," "cooperation," "peer-reviewed science" and "BMPs," then I guess we can step back and let the snowball to keep rolling downhill and pick up enough speed to crush common sense and golf-course conditioning.

As an example, Crystal River passed a ban on the sale and use of quick-release fertilizer in January. When questioned later, the city attorney who wrote the ordinance admitted he had no idea what quick-release fertilizer was. Since then, the green industry, which was left out of any discussions prior to the passage, has made a presentation and the city council says it will gather more information, but the damage is done. Everyone is jumping on the bandwagon.

The city of Sanibel passed a fertilizer ordinance the first week in March. It includes language mandating 70 percent slow-release fertilizer only, and no applications from July to October. Again nothing based on science or common sense. Golf got lucky in Sanibel. Thanks to a strong working relationship between a local golf course and the city, Sanibel golf courses are required to abide by the new Golf BMPs.

Meanwhile, Jacksonville is prepping for an ordinance that is so confusing and generalized that people are having a hard time figuring it out. Sarasota has taken the past year to hold stakeholder meetings, but even now the questions they are posing show a real lack of knowledge. We have to fill in the gaps and our opponents keep saying, "Don't trust that turf science, they paid for it!"

Of course they don't have *any* science, but that doesn't stop the media from reporting their self-serving statements.

Waiting not so patiently in the wings are Martin County, Citrus County and the Southwest Regional Planning Council wants to enact some sort of multi-county fertilizer plan. They are completely oblivious to the State Fertilizer Rule currently undergoing public hearings beginning March 29. There are too few of us to try and stick our thumbs in all the dikes springing lawmaking leaks all over the state. We need your help to take care of business in your own back yard.

Meanwhile, a green industry task group is working to come up with a manifesto and some simple bullet-point facts that can be handed out at your clubs, to your city and county commissions and to the public. But don't wait for us. We have to scrape up the money to pay for a PR campaign. You can be very effective by speaking out at your club and educating your immediate circle of customers, members, family and friends.

You can either explain the crisis to them now and how it can affect their club and their yards, or you can explain it to them when the turf looks bad and your job is in the balance. Which do you think is the best course of action to take? Are you still willing to be a silent minority?