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A Product that Demonstrates

‘Merit’

Hallmark insecticide is 10 years old and going strong

By Larry Aylward, Editor

It was 1996, the year that Cantigny Golf and Tennis Club in Wheaton, Ill., was hosting the prestigious Illinois Amateur Championship. In preparation for the event, certified superintendent Scott Witte decided it was time to integrate Merit insecticide into his turf maintenance program.

At the time, Witte had heard about the benefits of Merit, manufactured by Bayer Environmental Science, which had been on the market for two years. His peers were impressed with Merit’s long residual control at low applications rates.

“When you have a big tournament like that, the last thing you want to think about is having black turfgrass ataenius and other grubs infest your fairways or high-profile rough areas,” Witte says.

Eight years later, superintendents remain equally impressed with Merit, which celebrated its 10th anniversary in March. They’re still talking about the product’s significant staying power. Michael Whitehead, superintendent of Pawtucket Country Club in Seekonk, Mass., says he still regards the product as “revolutionary” to the industry.

“On it first time, there was definitely a lot of excitement about the product — especially after people saw its results,” Whitehead says.

“The science of Merit is sound,” Witte adds. “It’s an intelligent approach to controlling grubs.”

Bayer discovered Merit in 1988. The product was granted an accelerated registration because its active ingredient, imidacloprid, provided a reduced-risk alternative to organophosphates and carbamates, according to Bayer. Imidacloprid, in the chloronicotinyl chemical class, interferes with the normal nerve impulse transmissions of many insects. Merit is regarded as a more environmentally friendly product because it provides long residual control at low applications rates.

In the early ’90s, there was a smorgasbord of insecticides, but none had the residual control of Merit, says Mike Ruizzo, marketing manager of Merit. At the time, with environmental regulations increasing, the golf industry needed an insecticide that didn’t have to be applied several times a season.

“There were some good active ingredients, but they didn’t offer season-long control,” says Ruizzo, who has been with Bayer for 15

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years. "That was a real issue. [Merit] filled a gap and a need."

Before Merit arrived, Whitehead says superintendents couldn't do a lot preven-
tatively to control grubs. "You pretty much tried to knock them back once you scouted out a problem," he adds.

Merit also controls mole crickets, bill-
bugs, lace bugs, aphids, adelgids, soft scales
and others pests. "It provides a proven
solution to many different insect pests in
many different climates," Ruizzo says.

Witte says Merit has reduced his stress
level when it comes to worrying about
grubs and other pests, not to mention the
skunks and raccoons that have dug up turf
to feed on the insects. Witte knows that as
long as he applies Merit correctly and at
the right time — usually in late June —
he doesn't have to worry about insect or
animal damage to his fairways and roughs
for the season. Merit's low use rates impress
Whitehead and Witte.

"Consider that 1.6 ounces will
treat 8,000 square feet to 11,000
square feet," Witte says. "It's as-
tounding that it works so well at such
a light rate."

Superintendents also like Merit because
it's flexible. Each formulation — wettable
powder (75WP), flowable (Merit 2), water-
soluble packets (75WSP) and granular (.5G
and 2.5G) — has a large application win-
dow and can be drenched, injected or
sprayed as a liquid, or spread in measured
amounts as a granular. "From an applica-
tor standpoint, it's a pleasure to work with," Whitehead says.

Ruizzo remembers researching Merit
back in the early '90s. He says Bayer's
research, as well as university research,
revealed that the product worked excep-
tionally on grubs. He knew Bayer had
something good on its hands. "It has more
than 90 percent efficacy on the major grubs
species," Ruizzo says.

Merit has exceeded Bayer's expectations,
Ruizzo adds. "You don't expect a
product that's 10 years out to be growing at the pace that Merit is
growing," he says.

And that growth has come with few
complaints, Ruizzo notes. "Our complaints
averaged less than 1 percent for every year
in the 10-year period."

Bayer is using Merit's 10th anniversary
as a promotional tool with various pro-
motions and giveaways. "We don't do that
for every product," Ruizzo says.

Bayer and Merit will be facing some
challenges, though. Merit's patent expires
in 2006, meaning that post-patent or
generic products featuring Merit's charac-
teristics will be available.

Ruizzo, who's in charge of Merit in the
post-patent era, says Bayer is already plan-
ing for the day. There will probably be
new formulations and new uses and ap-
plications for Merit, although Ruizzo
couldn't be specific because he says the
information is confidential. •

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