



## Minnesota in the Crosshairs *Fertilizer Prices, New Chemistries and Polar Bears, Oh My!*

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And you thought fertilizer pricing might actually stabilize or, God forbid, decline with falling crude prices? Dream on! A regional fertilizer blending company recently released this bit of dark news – urea prices have skyrocketed 45% in the last few months AND all other nitrogen products are following as well. This trend is contrary to industry predictions for this winter and spring. In the past, natural gas prices and natural disasters (Katrina being the most recent) were the strongest factors affecting nitrogen pricing. It now appears that three new players have joined the fray. They are increased foreign demand, increased domestic demand and greed.

**As our global market expands in this new millennium**, the U.S. market demand for urea is competing with other countries for the same product. Chinese urea consumption, as of late, has risen dramatically, forcing China to increase the export tax on its domestically produced urea from 15% to 30%. Consequently, U.S. import levels dropped over one million tons during the last half of 2006. India has also recently become a big player in the urea market, requiring substantially more product for its needs.

**On the home front, corn is the driving force** behind increased domestic urea consumption. Corn prices are rising due to demand from ethanol plants. Numerous new production plants are currently under construction, or will be shortly, throughout the Midwest. Estimates project an additional 7-8 million acres planted to corn in 2007, requiring an increase of 15% to 25% in nitrogen application. Corn produces more bushels per acre than soybeans so the profit potential is more attractive to the farmer. Winter wheat production in the U.S. is also affecting nitrogen supplies. Total winter wheat acreage has increased 9% this year. Increased demand is driving prices higher.

**We are all aware of the extensive corporate consolidation** that has occurred over the past 10 to 15 years. In the U.S. there are only three major fertilizer producers; POTASH Corp, Agrium, and Mosaic. Agrium now owns NuGro, Pursell Technologies, Polyon, PCSCU, Nitroform, and Nutralene. These three companies "influence" the market by changing their production levels and import levels of raw materials. They have learned over the past few years that they can sell their product at a higher price and the market will allow it. Of course, they make record profits. Capitalism - Greed...or both? You decide as you try to stretch every last penny from that ever-shrinking operations budget.

**Update:** This just in from various sources...fertilizer pricing will increase this spring anywhere from 1% - 8%. Increases should not affect early-order product. Kudos to those who placed orders in 2006.

The latest industry rags show reason for optimism when it comes to new chemistries, formulations and products for the golf maintenance industry. Here are some highlights:

**Bayer Environmental has recently obtained registration on a new broad-spectrum**, pyrethroid insecticide called Tempo Ultra. This product provides quick knockdown of many insect pests including EAB. Bayer is also waiting on registration for Lynx fungicide. Lynx is a sterol inhibitor that differs from others in this chemical class due to its reported activity on dollar spot, anthracnose and brown patch.

**Syngenta is also waiting on registration for its insecticide called Meridian.** The active ingredient, thiamethoxam, allows for a broad application window and is reported to be effective on many common turf insects including ants and grubs.

**The Andersons, together with Syngenta, are introducing a new formulation of Governor.** It is a granular Primo growth regulator and fertilizer combination product.

**Dow AgroSciences is introducing a sprayable version of Dimension herbicide.** The water-based 2EW formulation offers both pre-emergence and early post-emergence control of crabgrass and can be sprayed over landscape beds.

**BASF is rumored to be introducing a new active ingredient** at the 2007 GIS but company officials will not comment.

**Cleary Chemical claims to have several new chemistries in the works**, both fungicides and insecticides, but it will be one to three years before they hit the market.

### **WARNING! WARNING!**

*The following may contain comments or facts  
that may be construed as political comment*

It appears the United States Fish and Wildlife Service is examining the possible addition of the polar bear to the Endangered Species List (ESL). One would think that with such action, things look rather bleak for this beautiful creature. Maybe global climate change is taking its toll? After all, isn't Arctic ice, the hunting grounds of this animal, melting at an unprecedented rate?

Let's take a look at the contents of a 12-page report submitted in 2006 to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service by Dr. Mitch Taylor, a polar bear biologist in Nunavut territory, northern Canada. According to Dr. Taylor, polar bears evolved from grizzly bears some 250,000 years ago and developed into their own distinct species around 125,000 years ago. In his report he emphasized the adaptability of this bear over time through numerous climate fluctuations. According to Taylor, "Of the 13 populations of polar bears in Canada, 11 are stable or are increasing in number. They are not going extinct, or even appear to be affected at present." Polar bear numbers have never been higher. In the 1950s and 1960s polar bear numbers were estimated at 5,000-10,000 due to sport hunting which has since been restricted. The USFWS estimates population numbers between 20,000 and 25,000.

Dr. Taylor goes on to explain that one declining polar bear population, located in western Hudson Bay, is being used to fuel the push for a place on the ESL. But, as it turns out, hunting by locals is allowed in this region. Polar bear numbers have dropped by 259 in the last 17 years, yet 234 bears were killed in just the last five years according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. Ironically, the Canadian government is currently considering raising the quota of bears harvested from Western Hudson Bay population!

"At present, the polar bear is one of the best-managed of the large Arctic mammals," Taylor said. "If all the Arctic nations continue to abide by the terms and intent of the Polar Bear Agreement, the future of polar bears is secure." Is there reason for concern over the fate of the polar bear? You be the judge.