

POTENTIAL IDEAS AND STRATEGIES TO MARKET THE REDUCTION OF ESCAPED PHOSPHORUS FROM LAWN AND LANDSCAPE ENVIRONMENTS

**Benjamin Yost
Farm N Garden Inc.
Kalamazoo, MI**

Considering the Benefits

Reducing escaped phosphorus from lawn and landscape environments offers a unique opportunity to lawn and landscape care professionals. Integrating strategies to improve environmental health into the marketing of lawn and landscape care products and services offers the potential to add sustained value to companies who embrace this and other important environmental initiatives. In addition to the advantages realized by businesses that employ these strategies are other benefits including:

- A.) improving the environmental health in our communities and natural world.
- B.) extending opportunities of education and knowledge directly to consumers through their purchasing habits.
- C.) raising critical industry standards serving to nurture consumer confidence creating companies with market distinction

Creating Sustained Demand

Both the reduction of escaped phosphorus and the building of sustainable profit centers related to this need are well served to be thought of as long term ventures. Critical to success is the importance of initiating and sustaining demand for improved methods of care by home and property owners. A demand for products and services born out of a sound environmental initiative has the potential to bolster competition creating a higher level of industry standards. Higher standards serve to further demand and increase opportunities for companies offering care strategies that consider both plant *and* environmental health.

Packaging Strategies to Reduce Escaped Phosphorus

Packaging the proper use of nutrients, including phosphorus, and providing for their containment in lawn and landscape environments offers the opportunity to integrate existing products and services into a larger cohesive marketing strategy. Many common care practices such as mowing, fertilizing, leaf and debris pick up, lawn establishment and landscape construction can be examined for their usefulness relative to their integration into such a strategy.

Communicating to the consumer the importance of conducting these practices in such a way that reduces escaped phosphorus potentially places the perceived value of lawn and landscape care in an entirely new context. It is the very concept of changing the emphasis of care to that of sustaining both plant *and* environmental health that can be packaged, marketed and sold on its merits. As more research is completed, a clearer understanding of the impact of normal lawn and landscape care on escaped phosphorus will help guide individual companies and the industry in their stewardship objectives.

Mowing

Mowing produces clippings which, as they decompose, redistribute phosphorus on the soil surface. While in a lawn environment this process represents the natural cycling of nutrients, the dispersal of lawn clippings onto city streets and into surface water leaves open the potential for escape of phosphorus. Avoiding the dispersal of clippings into city streets, near storm drains and open bodies of water might offer an important form of phosphorus reduction and add tangible value to a very common practice.

Fertilization

Greater utilization and standardization of the practice of soil testing to determine nutrient needs not only adds value to existing practices but also exists as an untapped source of revenue. Soil testing would likely offer the indication of using fertilizer products containing phosphorus *only* as needed for seed and sod establishment or when application is justified to correct a nutrient deficiency.

Phosphorus does not easily find its way out of a lawn's thatch and its soil environment once it has been applied. The potential exists however for the inadvertent application of phosphorus to impervious surfaces such as sidewalks, roads or driveways where it can easily be flushed into storm drains and open bodies of water. Using phosphorus free fertilizer products in addition to blowing and sweeping fertilizer products off of these surfaces and back into a lawn offers potential to reduce its escape and again can add great value to a rather common practice of lawn care.

Leaf Pickup and Debris Disposal

In addition to the potential escape of phosphorus from lawn clippings, fallen tree leaves and other miscellaneous plant debris can potentially contribute to its escape when left on city streets, or when it finds its way into open water. Employing methods of leaf and debris disposal that minimize this contribution can offer potential for reduced escape and increased value of services.

Lawn Establishment and Landscape Construction

Eroding soil offers a fast, efficient avenue for phosphorus escape. The use of erosion fencing around open soil sites during establishment and construction offers the potential to keep soil and its phosphorus component contained on site. The very use of properly applied phosphorus during seed and sod establishments presents the opportunity to speed up establishment and bring about a thick, healthy lawn environment that can effectively hold the soil.

Landscapes which, through proper grade design, effectively minimize runoff into surface water and city streets also offer the potential of reduced phosphorus escape. Integrating these practices into a comprehensive strategy adds value to the services of not only the landscape and lawn care professional but also to the landscape architect designing municipal, commercial and residential projects.

Best Management Practices

As proper seed establishment favors fast efficient turf cover, proper care practices, often termed “best management practices”, favor sustaining turf cover requiring less problem solving. Using research supported methods of care relating to mowing, fertilizing, irrigating, as well as cultivation, species selection, and pest control offers potentially healthier lawns requiring less inputs and need for re-establishment. While many of these influences might not point directly to escaped phosphorus reduction, they serve to advance an important element in promoting an industry that embraces long term solutions to improve both plant *and* environmental health.

Keeping an Eye on the Goal

While these ideas and potential strategies offer one view of the opportunities before us, continued research and industry involvement are imperative to realize success. Open discussions and brainstorming sessions involving all relevant groups must take place to position the lawn and landscape industry as an important contributor to this evolving environmental initiative. Individual companies meanwhile must examine their own potential in embracing new concepts of environmental stewardship for their own sustained success.