



## A matter of integrity and trust

**J**ust over 20 years ago, a colleague wrote a short article alerting readers to unflattering data for a product being promoted as the next great chemical turfgrass grub control. Grubs are every lawn's worst nightmare.

My friend hardly expected the backlash resulting from his article that he based on a summary of the research of a well-respected Midwest entomologist. Appearing in an issue of *Lawn Care Industry* magazine, a sister publication to *Landscape Management* at the time, the piece related how the scientist's field-testing showed that the insecticide was being captured by turfgrass thatch and degrading before making it into the soil where, of course, grubs do their dirty work.

The article ignited an angry reaction from an executive with the chemical company. He demanded further explanation from the scientist and a public mea culpa from the editor. The executive insisted his company's research showed that the molecule provided excellent grub control. (Yes, in the laboratory, the molecule probably tested very well indeed.)

Money and reputations were at stake. His company had already started a sizable marketing campaign for the product.

The researcher stuck to his data, and the magazine wouldn't budge either. Both had much to lose — for the researcher, future research funding from the company; for the magazine, advertising revenue.

Not surprisingly, the product, with further testing confirming its unsuitability as a grub control, was allowed to fade away. The executive eventually cooled down, and sometime later in the 1990s his company was absorbed by a larger agrichemical company during a period of furious industry consolidation.

So, what's the point of rehashing this ancient history? The turfgrass industry (indeed, the public) rightfully relies upon a surprisingly small group of experienced and, yes, honest researchers — many

of them working at our major universities — tasked with testing and evaluating the products being developed for the use by professional applicators. In my 26 years covering the industry I'm not aware of a single instance of any of them falsifying data for any company's benefit. There's too much at stake — not the least of which is their reputations.

These researchers tell us what works, why it works and how best to use the modern chemical tools that science provides.

Beyond that, the environmental and human safety protocols established by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Environment Canada, which have been regularly reviewed and updated these past 40 years, are among the strictest in the world.

While I'm no expert on the processes our regulatory people follow to make sure the products we use on our properties pose no undue risks to our health, our children's health or the environment, I'm confident they're well-thought-out and result in reasonable decisions.

Has this system always worked perfectly? Of course not. The agrichemical business, and especially that portion of it focusing on developing lawn and garden chemicals and also of regulating their use, is barely a half century old.

Even so, the system — from the university level through the halls of our regulatory agencies and with ongoing refinements — has worked remarkably well. And it continues to work. It's not broken.

That said, some lawmakers in our Canadian provinces and in our state capitals, attracted by what they sense as a populist issue, continue to bend to the emotional rhetoric of groups seeking to ban or restrict the use of products that, I believe, have been rigorously but reasonably tested. These critics unapologetically disparage the opinions (in some instances, integrity) of scientists and regulators most knowledgeable about these products. On what grounds it's not clear.