

Firmly syngenta® established

Scott MacCallum discovers what is behind the recent success of BIGGA Gold Key Supporter, Syngenta.

Syngenta may be a young company – having been formed in 2000 and not breaking into the UK golf market until 2005 – but in those six years many Course Managers have come to rely heavily on the products that it has developed and services that it provides.

With Primo Maxx, Rescue, Banner Maxx., Instrata and Medalion TL among the big hitters in its portfolio along with the industry standard Heritage Maxx, and back up services like the GreenCast website, innovative nozzle application technology and environmental initiatives, the days before their existence already seem like a distant memory to many grateful turf professionals.

But behind the company is a long history and pedigree with its roots in ICI, Zeneca and Novartis.

“We have always seen ourselves as solution providers, rather than just selling a product. We work hard to produce good products, provide the after sales care and build relationships with our customers,” explained Syngenta’s Rod Burke, as we talked at Marriott Hanbury Manor Hotel and Country Club, along with one of those customers, Course Manager, Andrew Howarth.

“That’s the Syngenta way, and how the company operates in all of its markets. We are never in a situation where we just put a product out and walk away. It doesn’t work like that, and it also helps us because we get feedback from the customer about where we need to go and the new products we need to research,” explained Rod.

Much of that turf research work is carried out at Stein, in Switzerland, a vast complex containing laboratories, greenhouses and climate chambers. It even has breeding stations for pests and diseases, to replicate golf course problems



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in test conditions. No stone is left unturned in the unwavering ambition to produce new products.

In the UK, the company also has a base at Jealott’s Hill, near Reading, where testing of new active ingredients is carried out in mind boggling numbers, aimed at uncovering those which should be put forward for further development work as potential new products.

It all goes to explain the huge investment required to create a new product— estimates place it at anything up to £200 million to develop a new active ingredient and bring it to the market.. “That includes meeting all the various and demanding regulatory requirements which are set by individual countries or

regions. Product development can take a decade or more from the first discovery through to market. Once the development work has been completed it still takes around two years to go through the regulation process in the UK and in other countries like Spain, up to a further five years. It is a huge amount of work,” explained Rod.

But that effort is appreciated by people like Andrew, at Hanbury Manor, who has used Syngenta products almost as long as they have been available in the UK, and who provided one of the trial sites for the recently-launched Medalion TL, a contact+ fungicide, which offers protection from fusarium.

Such was his confidence in the





TOP: Research work
 ABOVE: Syngenta spends a lot of time working with its customers
 LEFT: Andrew Howarth, Course Manager at Marriott Hanbury Manor
 BELOW: Disease microscopy



product and in Syngenta's track record, Andrew gave it an extensive trial on the greens at Hanbury Manor at the end of November last year.

"It snowed the very next day and the greens were covered for the best part of four weeks, but when it cleared the greens were perfect," he said.

Timing of the application is all important and this is where the GreenCast website comes into its own as a disease prevention tool as it identifies the potential for disease to strike.

"Historically, greenkeepers have used a 'wait and see' approach to management. If they saw disease they would spray it and be disappointed when it returned two weeks later," explained Rod.

"With the ability of GreenCast to identify when disease is most likely to strike, the spraying can be carried out just before the disease becomes established and as a result, typically, it provides six to eight weeks of control. By targeting the spraying at the most effective time you can actually reduce the number of spraying applications you use in the course of a year

ensuring that products are used at the right time for best effect and creating savings overall."

It is a view that is endorsed by Andrew:

"We very much operate on a preventative basis but we aim to be specific. It's certainly not a scatter gun approach and so tools like GreenCast are great. You might think in your own mind that it is the right day to go ahead with an application but now you then check with GreenCast which can confirm if you are right," said Andrew, who admits to visiting the site at least once a day.

"As greenkeepers we are all obsessed with the weather so it's great to have somewhere to go which has so much useful information."

Andrew was also one of the first to use the growth regulator, Primo Maxx, which perhaps more than any other has left its mark on the industry in the last 10 years.

"I started using Primo Maxx in 2007 and believe I was in the first group of people to do so. It has made a huge difference in terms of quality of surface, as well as savings in manpower as a result of the growth regulator element of it.

"I have to say that it has done everything that we wanted it to do and we've got more out of it the more we have used it and learnt about it," explained Andrew, for whom quality at such a high profile golfing venue is of prime importance.

Indeed, like so many of his fellow users, Andrew has become more sophisticated in his use of Primo Maxx, which is now an integral part of the turf management routine.

Syngenta has done a significant amount of research aimed at putting together a persuasive case for golf clubs to invest in turf management - clearly demonstrating the benefits and value created by new solutions and techniques to bring an economic benefit.

"We provide the tools for Course Managers like Andrew, to take a proposal to their Director or General Manager to persuade them to move forward on a programme of investment in turf quality," explained Rod, who added that this was done on a number of fronts.

"On quality, if you can increase membership by just 1% that typically equates to an extra £5000 income a year, while if you attract five more players a week with your quality golf course that increases income by around £15,000 a year on typical figures," explained Rod.

Furthermore they have also researched the benefits on cost

savings that are there to be had.

"It costs £15 per hour to run a mower, if you include labour, machinery costs and fuel. The growth regulation properties of Primo Maxx reduces the mowing requirement and cuts associated costs, as well as freeing up labour for other course improvements and detailing to increase the players enjoyment of their round."

As part of the marketing approach Syngenta has put together a series of packages including the Ultimate Fairway Programme in conjunction with distribution partner Everris, containing all that is needed to produce top quality fairways including Primo Maxx, nutrition and nozzles which have been developed to ensure that the company's product is applied in an effective and accurate fashion.

"Our big drive is to reduce water rates and reduce drift, both of which our nozzles help to achieve. Where our trials show it is appropriate we aim to reduce water volumes to 200-250 litres per application, from current typical levels of 600-650 litres. It will help to spray quicker and reduce costs, as well as enhancing product efficacy and results," said Rod, who explained that Syngenta also works extremely closely with the STRI on its research.

Syngenta is also the driving force behind Operation Pollinator, an international five year biodiversity programme to boost the number of pollinating insects by creating specific habitats, tailored to local conditions and native insects.

In golf, the project aims to utilise out of play areas to increase the attractiveness of courses for insects and players.

Participants are provided with agronomic advice and innovative research based practices to successfully establish and manage specific wildflower mixtures designed to benefit pollinators and improve course playability.

As a Gold Key Supporter of BIGGA since 2008 Syngenta supports the Association's Education and Development Fund, which was set up to offer support and tools for BIGGA members.

"We see the professional development of BIGGA members as being extremely beneficial to the industry," added Rod.

"We increasingly find that we are dealing with professionals of the quality of Andrew, who appreciate what we are bringing to the market place in terms of high performance products, integrated solutions and services and comprehensive support."