



# On the Soapbox

This month, Turf Consultant, Anthony Asquith takes to the Soapbox

**I am always amazed and intrigued at the amount of products out there that come with big claims in terms of their huge benefits to turf and soils alike.**

There is a plethora of such products around, from biological to some that provide simple forms of plant nutrient but are marketed as a wonder product. In my many years of independent turf research looking at products and materials, I have looked at and measured the effects of such products on turf grass. A lot of these generic products show results leading me to conclude that cost by far out-ways results.

In my honest opinion there is no silver bullet solution in turf regardless of what people say. It's important to use reliable tried and tested materials. We now live in a world where we are told what to buy, what to apply and what impressive things it can do but sometimes there is enough truth in it to widely exaggerate the product. Far too often, a lot of the information in brochures relies on the gullibility of the reader.

My advice to anyone would be ask for independent supportive data from a source you can place utter faith in and it should not be classed as sceptical to question everything. Quite often, I am classed as a sceptic but it is a very easy way for the salesman to get out of answering legitimate questions.

The key area for me is how much does X product improve turf? a few percent is not worth the cost but we need to see significant improvement in many facets. Also, has there been any statistical verification that such products improve turf? The answer to a lot of these is in short – No! We now live in a world where scaremongering is so rife people find it difficult to work out what is good information and what is poor information and what works and what doesn't. It is important turf managers ask for quality literature to support and justify claims made and not just go by the sales hype in magazines or from company brochures or presentations. Often people are spending a lot of time and money on products that are producing that elusive few percent of improvement but does this X% warrant the cost and timely application of such products? It has to be said that the amount of Iron or Nitrogen contained within some products is really the only thing that shows signs of improvement (hence the colour response) It's the most expensive form of N or Fe they will ever buy.

One worrying aspect for me, is the publication of research work by persons who are being paid to research, measure and evaluate the product or products by the product company so, again, it's important to get such informa-

tion from reputable sources and one's you can place faith in. Therefore I have to question the validity and the authenticity of the work been carried out and the results presented. I am not saying dismiss for the sake of it, but ask for supportive data to justify claims made that warrants and justifies the expense.

Another problem occurs with chemical soil testing accuracy. The results from such tests allow companies to produce lists of recommendations of fertiliser programmes that encourage the purchase of products by the end users. These recommendations are given without any correlation

significant benefit before being purchased in any amounts. If one is interested in such a product but the company cannot provide real independent data then my advice to them would be to ask to trial the product at the companies expense not yours. Any company that has a real belief in their product should not have a problem with supplying a potential purchaser with a trial amount. If they do supply a trial amount make sure you carry out reliable trials under controlled conditions which are properly measured. I have found many times products are bought and trialed without proper testing and

## Keep it independent

to field trial response or historical site data. A lot of this type of information is not impartial.

What has become very apparent is the simple fact that very little reliable work has been carried out with turf grasses. There has been very little research or trial work into just how much grasses require nutritionally. This is down to the virtual impossibility of being able to carry out such work due to the varied range of grasses, cultivars, soils etc and the range of conditions that they would need to be tested.

It is important that any product is trialed, tested and statistically verified as being of

measuring plots and standard acceptable testing procedures.

My advice is always trial yourself and trial it properly to get meaningful results. I have done this over the years so I am happy to advise anyone.



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