

# BACKING IT UP

Chemical manufacturers support their products with research and sales reps. BY JOHN WALSH

It's no secret chemical manufacturers support superintendents and the industry in various ways. Some are sexy, such as sponsorships, events and seminars. Some are less sexy but perhaps more important. For example, conducting research and providing qualified sales/field representatives might seem basic, but many superintendents say the benefits are critical.

At its development and training facility in Clayton, N.C. – which has four golf holes and turf plots with a mix of push-up greens and USGA-spec greens – Bayer conducts research on warm- and cool-season turf, including comparable treatments for herbicides, insecticides and fungicides. The company continually brings customers to the facility demonstrating its support of the industry, says Scott Welge, director of marketing for the green professional business.

"We showcase the Clayton facility with

current customers first, but the facility also is available for those who don't know Bayer, and it gives us an opportunity to show customers what we offer and can do," Welge says. "The research there is somewhat different than other places. We can replicate real-world situations in a matter of hours, when needed, in addition to normal research plots. There's a lot of work on product improvements, spray volume, surfactants, irrigation, application timing and tank-mixing compatibility. We provide meaningful feedback about superintendents' issues."

The facility also allows Bayer the flexibility it needs.

"We can run trials mid-season and have the availability of the turf and other needed resources during the season," Welge says.

Research also is important when it comes to introducing new products in the market. University researchers and research cooperators are involved early on with product development, and after a product is launched in the market, unbiased research is needed

to compare new products with competitive ones.

"We present our research as internal or external, or a combination of both," Welge says. "Work done at universities is public information. Internal research is sometimes used but clearly noted in any information released externally. Each of the field sales reps have access to the data. If it's a specific product or data, a superintendent usually asks

a research cooperator, distributor sales rep, field sales rep or technical specialist to obtain the efficacy data."

Because Dow's global headquarters is in the U.S., the company's research starts in the country. Once concepts are developed, they're tested at universities to validate the company's products and claims. The research information is disseminated through field days, newsletters, local sales reps and local superintendent meetings.

"We have a new major work effort with Purdue," says Mark Urbanowski, senior marketing specialist for the turf and ornamental business. "We don't publish a lot of our own research because people think they know what you're going to say. The information that comes through the universities is more important."

There's a lot of internal testing during the eight to 10 years of product development before the company markets a product.

**>>** This is the second part of a two-part article about how chemical manufacturers support the industry. The first article appeared in the November issue on page 56.

Syngenta's research is done corporately and locally with universities. Company technicians have relationships with university researchers who work together to enhance and improve products.

"We take research at universities and our research and put it in a format to take to superintendents," says Dave Ravel, golf market manager.



"We put together all the research information, and our tech reps write agronomic programs based on that. And with GreenCast, we can offer a suggested spray program, for example, for superintendents."

The company also has field technical managers, such as Michael Agnew, Ph.D., and others who publish research articles in various magazines and journals that reach superintendents.

DuPont Professional Products conducts a lot of research with universities, says Chuck Silcox, Ph.D., turf and ornamental product development manager. The company spent millions of dollars on efficacy trials during the past five years, which ultimately is a benefit to superintendents.

"We do most of our turf field research exter-

nally," Silcox says. "It's more effective to invest in outside research to provide superintendents with reliable data as we launch products into the market. We touch most of the major universities. And because of our relationships with universities, I can call upon researchers to share their expertise with superintendents who contact DuPont seeking advice. We're a conduit of information."

The company disseminates its research through sales reps, associations, distributors, Webcasts and even one-on-one with superintendents.

Cleary Chemical works with 20 different universities and has an extensive research-and-development budget, according to president Mary Ellen Warwick. The company also has superintendents test a product before it goes to market. Research data from the past 15 years is housed in a database that can be cross-referenced, and the company's sales reps have

Chemical manufacturers test their products internally and externally before marketing them to superintendents. Photo: BASF

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access to the data via laptops.

"We do some of our own research," Warwick says. "We don't have an R&D staff, so we work with researchers. Superintendents are looking for test results and how you stack up against the

competition. How and why a pesticide is made isn't as important to them."

In addition to university research, the company tests products on its own 18-hole public golf course, Tara Greens Golf Center.

BASF conducts internal research in California and North Carolina, as well as external research at various universities and FarmLinks. It also conducts research directly with superintendents.

"If a superintendent has a problem and thinks outside the box, we'll take him up on that and conduct research with him," says Toni Bucci, business manager for the T&O division of the agriculture division. "We work with credible researchers, yet there's value in doing research with smaller, lesser-known researchers because there might be something in a particular area that needs to be addressed."

Researchers usually don't put off the company because they're too busy with other work, Bucci says.

"They're just as excited as much as we are to test new products," she says. "There's a sense of pride in the research and being able to test it and recommend it or not."

Bucci says there's always a need to do more research about tank mixing because it's a common problem and new turfgrass varieties can be sensitive to a tank mix that worked fine on another grass.

BASF disseminates its research information through its sales reps, tech sheets, Web site and university research field days.

At FMC's Princeton, N.J., facility, scientists are working on new formulation technologies and delivery systems. And all current company projects are in testing through the university system, says Rick Ekins, product manager for turf and ornamental.

"The last herbicide we launched, Echelon, was tested at 12 universities in more than 60 trials nationwide, and that's just the 2007 data," he says.

University researchers are supportive of the company's initiatives.

"They have their own traveling circuits and share data with superintendents as they present their findings," Ekins says.

#### HUMAN TOUCH

Much like research, sales representatives are another area of support from chemical manufacturers superintendents can rely on to help do their job better. All chemical manufacturers' reps have a wealth of technical experience and related degrees. Many are former superintendents. Companies' sales forces range in size from less than 10 people to 30. And all companies train distribution sales reps.

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For example, FMC doesn't hire salespeople right out of college.

"We seek seasoned people with varying experience who are respected in the industry," Ekins says. "Some have been distributors before, and some are out of the university system."

Part of Bayer's sales training program is to educate reps so they know the company's products as well as the competitors.

"If a superintendent has a particular question, our field reps will walk the course with him," Welge says. "If the field rep can't answer the question, he'll call on a technical specialist, who is also in the field."

Superintendents want to know about new pests, new product recommendations and how other superintendents are dealing with a common problem, Welge says.

"Our field sales reps reputations are on the line every time they make a recommendation," he says.

Chemical manufacturers' sales reps, many of whom are former golf course superintendents, put their reputations on the line with the recommendations they make.



And because Bayer sells its products through distributors, the distributor sales reps provide valuable product and agronomic information.

"We provide distributor training about our products and emerging pest problems as well," Welge says. "Superintendents have a lot more contact with the distributor sales reps throughout the year, so we actively work with the DSRs, so at every point of contact, the superintendent has the most updated information."

Dow's reps are involved in local superintendent chapters, educational sessions and help

superintendents work through environmental or pesticide regulations.

"We hire a mix of employees that come in at the sales level," Urbanowski says. "Some come from agronomic schools, and others come from business schools, although someone with an ag degree hits the ground running faster. The business guys go through short courses on the technical side. We rely on the expertise of the distribution reps, too. We hire the best people and rotate within the company but keep a good balance of turf specific guys in the field."

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Like other chemical manufacturers, Syngenta reps support superintendents in various ways.

“The sale of our products and our relationship with our customers doesn’t end at the cash register,” Ravel says. “Our local tech reps know the area – regarding soil and environmental conditions – they work in. They work with superintendents and cooperate with many local universities to run soil tests, for example.”

Syngenta’s vehicle to get its products to market are its distributor sales reps, who benefit from working one-on-one with the company’s technical sales reps.

“Our technical sale reps will do road shows and sit in with the distributor sales reps to help explain new products,” Ravel says.

The distributor sales reps, who outnumber the tech reps 45 to one, will have more contact with superintendents than the tech reps, who write agronomic programs.

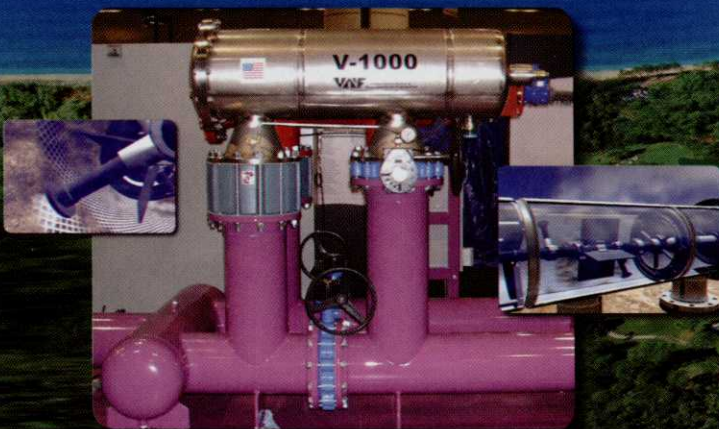
DuPont’s reps attend regional superintendent meetings and present information about market needs, answer questions about herbicides and overseeding, and suggest ways superintendents can make products last longer and suggest whether they should use surfactants or not.

The company is anticipating expanding its sales force in 2008, says Nancy Schwartz, marketing manager for turf professional products. **GCI**



University researchers and research cooperators are involved early on with chemical manufacturers’ product development. Photo: BASF

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