

**S**o I'm standing in the middle of a huge corporate greenhouse in Germany attempting to converse with a TV broadcaster from China whose cameraman speaks a little French.

A French farm magazine writer attempts to translate for me. I ask Ms. Wu, "Have you ever played golf before?"

After two minutes of furious back-and-forth between the three of them, the French journalist turns to me and says, "She say she like American football very much." So much for overcoming the language barrier.

The occasion for this surreal cultural exchange was a tour of Syngenta facilities in and around Zurich, Switzerland, for agricultural journalists from around the world. I was tapped for the trip because they wanted to bring in someone from the turf media and, just by chance, I'm currently the president of the Turf & Ornamental Communicators Association. (Finally, volunteering for an association leadership post pays off!)

Despite the fact that turf and golf are a relatively small part of Syngenta's — or any other big crop protection company's — global focus, the trip was nonetheless fascinating. Here are a few highlights and observations:

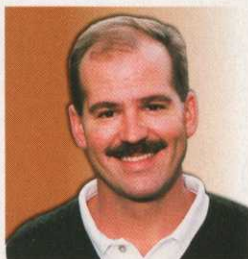
■ Even though Syngenta's overall crop protection sales were down 2 percent in the first half of the fiscal year, professional products, which represent only about 10 percent of the company's global revenues, were a bright spot, jumping 7 percent. When I started a question to CEO Michael Pragnell by saying, "Even though you probably don't wake up in the morning thinking about the U.S. turf market..." he interrupted me with a smile and said, "Oh yes we do." In short, our little piece of the pie is relatively profitable and growing at a time when ag sales are down or flat worldwide.

■ During a tour of Syngenta's massive research campus at Stein, Germany, we learned that chemical companies typically sift through more than 200,000 compounds to bring one new one to the market.

It's largely done with computer modeling to speed the process, but our lab coat-clad

## Tour Illuminates Chemical Business

BY PAT JONES



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German tour guide, who spoke pretty good English, still described it as "looking for a needle in a hay heap."

■ The next time someone questions the safety of the pesticides you use, remember these figures I heard during the tour: Before a chemical is registered by EPA, it's been through at least 10,000 individual tests over 10 years at an average cost of \$150 million. Concerned golfers or soccer moms should rest assured that this is no fly-by-night process.

■ Meridian, the new insecticide product Syngenta has been trying to bring to market for some time, is still being held up in the United States and Europe for "Risk Cup" reasons. The Risk Cup is the new, ridiculously complex standard for pesticide registration set up under FQPA. The company is optimistic but it's still unable to say for sure when Meridian will be available in the United States. Curiously, the only country to approve Meridian for turf is Japan, which has historically been very slow to register anything.

■ On the nonbusiness side of the trip, I was a bit shocked at how many Europeans view President Bush as a warmonger. One Irish journalist was in my face for an hour about how Bush is leading the world into nuclear Armageddon.

■ If you go to Zurich, you sure as heck better like veal. These people must have starved during the Mad Cow disease scare.

All in all, it was an excellent and educational adventure. I'm hopeful that other companies will see the value of these tours, particularly if their factory is in, say, the Virgin Islands.

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