

Recently I was asked if a particular compound used on golf courses was a “must have” or “nice to have” product. It was a sobering question that deserves a thoughtful answer. I challenge you to consider your pesticide inventories. What are your must-have and nice-to-have products?

For instance, just ask managers of cool-season grasses if particular fungicides are a must have or nice to have. In the Sunbelt and areas with sandy soils, just ask if having an effective nematicide is a must have or nice to have. The same goes for pre-plant soil fumigation to control all pest populations.

Actually the question is too broad to have just a simple answer. It would be convenient if all environmental issues could be boiled down to a single black-and-white yes or no. But the reality is the answer is almost always “yes but” or “no but.” The “buts” deserve consideration. If a particular product is up for re-registration, phase-out or cancellation, what are the ramifications if it is no longer available?

We have seen the demise of many products over the past 20 years with the broad-spectrum compounds giving way to pest-specific products. Whenever such cancellations and phase-outs occur based on sound peer-reviewed science, you won’t hear much booing from the peanut gallery. It’s when the political footballs start getting punted around that the natives get restless.

Is it nice to have a product that controls a wide population of weeds, fungi or insects with one application? You bet your britches. It saves time and money and wear and tear on the equipment and the turf, and generally has less overall impact on the environment.

So, what if you lost that product because of debatable facts, global politics and lack of common sense? You might tend to be a bit frustrated and confused.

What if you lost a proven effective tool and there was no safer, viable alternative available? If you had to use more pesticides and water and fertilizer to help the turf outgrow the pest pressure, especially during grow-in, would the end justify the means? Would the environ-

Must Have? Or Nice to Have?

BY JOEL JACKSON



WE MAY NOT WIN
EVERY CONTEST,
BUT OUR RECORD
OF ACTION SHOULD
ALWAYS BE BASED
ON GOOD SCIENCE

ment really be better off? Maybe the lost product was perhaps a must have instead of a nice to have?

For the sake of argument, take the question to another level. Must we have or is it nice to have pristine, pest-free, manicured golf courses? Would golfers abandon the game in numbers so great that the industry, the professional tours, tourism and resorts would flounder and disappear?

What is the challenge and true nature of the game? Is it having flawless playing grounds or hitting the golf ball from point to point and dealing with the “rub of the green?” Your answer will vary with your dependence on the golf industry for a living. So will the answers of those who could care less about golf.

I only ask because I think we have been heading down a slippery slope the past few years. Political agendas and political correctness have been replacing common sense and peer-reviewed science in some decision-making procedures.

Giving in without due process is not an option. We may not win every contest, but our record of action should always be based on good science.

Superintendents generally tend to do the right thing, but they can get caught between demanding golfers and government policies, neither of which is likely to be the best arbiter for a sound, practical course of action.

I fear it’s getting to be a question of not what you must have or not what would be nice to have, but rather some politically expedient bureaucrat telling you what you may have.

Certified Superintendent Joel Jackson retired from Disney’s golf division in 1997 and is director of communications for the Florida GCSA.