

## Off The Fringe

# Expanding Their Horizons

STATE GRANT WILL ENABLE ANDERSONS TO PURSUE NEW TECHNOLOGY FOR TURFGRASS AND AGRICULTURE

By Larry Aylward, Editor-In-Chief

Chuck Anderson felt like he was back in college cramming all night for a final exam. Only this time, Anderson and some of his colleagues from The Andersons, the Maumee, Ohio-based agribusiness company, were cramming to ready a proposal for a chance to receive \$5 million in grants from the state of Ohio.

“Actually, it was like cramming four years of college into six weeks,” says Anderson, the company’s director of technical services and marketing development, adding that it took a team of 12 people working intently for a month and a half to complete the proposal. “The night before it was due, some people worked all night to finish it.”

All the hard work paid off. Last summer, The Andersons announced that a collaborative team it led will receive \$5 million in grants from the Ohio Third Frontier Commission, a state project whose goal is to expand Ohio’s high-tech research capabilities and promote innovation and company formation. The Andersons said it received the grants for the development and commercialization of advanced granules and other emerging technologies to provide solutions for the economic health and environmental concerns of the green industry and the agriculture industry.

The Andersons granular technology includes Contec DG in the golf industry, which is marketed by the company’s turf and specialty group, Andersons Golf Products. The grant enables The Andersons to accelerate its research in



extending this proprietary technology to agriculture applications, according to Tom Waggoner, president of The Andersons Turf & Specialty Group.

Waggoner is excited the company received the grant because it means the state believes The Andersons can create products that can have a positive impact.

“We look at our business as a quality-of-life industry,” Waggoner said. “How much better does it get than to help make the world green? How much better does it get than having a hand in creating an environment for kids and adults who can go outside and feel good about what they’re in?”

Waggoner said the world’s current emphasis on environmental sustainability plays into the green industry’s hands. Turfgrass has plenty to do with quality of life when you consider recreational activities such as golf, he added.

Other members of the collaborative team are: The Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center (OARDC), the nation’s largest ag-biosciences center; Syngenta Crop Protection; PSB Co., an Ohio-based manufacturer of granule applicators; National Lime and Stone Co., an Ohio-based limestone supplier and granulator of advanced soil-dispersing granules; and Ohio Bio-products Innovation Center (OBIC), a state group that fosters industry and academic collaboration.

In December of 2007, the last thing on Chuck Anderson’s and Tom Waggoner’s minds was to apply for grant money. They were in the middle of the biggest professional turf product launch in the company’s history, Contec DG.

“The last thing we wanted to do was more research when we were just launching [the dispersible granule] technology that took us years to

Jesse Walle, Tom Waggoner, Chuck Anderson and Mike Bandy have \$5 million more to work with for R&D, thanks to a state grant.

get to market,” Anderson said.

But Tim Birthisel, technical manager of the turf and specialty group, found out about possible state funding through the OBIC, which committed to help The Andersons. Chuck Anderson said the OBIC “pushed us to think bigger.”

The company heard it only had about a 10 percent chance of getting funding, but Waggoner, Anderson, Birthisel and others liked their chances.

Anderson said it was evident the opportunity was bigger than to benefit just the turfgrass industry. “There was a greater cause,” he said.

Last winter, the company decided to draw up a proposal to apply for the grant. The proposal had to do with using technology to improve environmental and efficacy of delivering fertilizers and pesticides, not just for turf but for all of agriculture, Waggoner says.

After making the first cut, the proposal was sent to the National Academy of Sciences, where two scientists were assigned to review it for about 60 days. After being scrutinized there, the proposal ended up in Columbus with the Ohio Department of Development, which was reviewing all the other proposals vying for grants.

A panel of scientists and business people gathered to determine the best proposals. They invited the proposers in to answer questions. Anderson said the panel consisted of about 18 people, and they grilled him, Waggoner, Birthisel and Syngenta’s Dennis Shepard for about 30 minutes.

“But we were ready,” Anderson said. Five million bucks proves that. ■