

Hobbs in the Driver's Seat at RISE

New president aims to have good relationships on Capitol Hill

Have partisan politics in Washington ever been worse? That's debatable. But there's no doubt that partisan politics in Washington and even in our local communities are helping to divide our country.

Aaron Hobbs, the new president for RISE (Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment), gets to play in that arena. RISE is a national trade association of manufacturers, formulators and distributors involved with specialty pesticide and fertilizer products. The association monitors legislative and regulatory issues in Washington and the states.

"It's definitely a difficult time in Washington," says Hobbs, who spends a good share of time lobbying on Capitol Hill for RISE's members. "How do we deal with it? We persevere. We keep showing up and having dialogue. We learn from every opportunity we have to interact with legislators and their staffs."

Hobbs became president Sept. 1. He replaced Allen James, RISE's well-respected leader for 20 years. Hobbs joined RISE in March 2009 as its director of legislative affairs and grassroots outreach.

Hobbs says RISE association representatives want to form better relationships with lawmakers.

"We've created opportunities to go and talk to them and just catch up with them," Hobbs says.

So how does Hobbs approach a lawmaker? Does it matter if that person is a republican or a democrat?

"I don't necessarily care if they're republicans or democrats," Hobbs says. "I care about what their constituents want and how their constituents feel about the issues."

Hobbs admits RISE needs allies from both sides of the aisle. It's important to strike up positive dialogue with policymakers about the value that pesticides and fertilizers provide, he says.

Capitol Hill is different these days. You have to do your

homework and be more prepared to go out there than ever before, Hobbs says.

"You may have six meetings in a day and for every meeting you may have a different set of talking points," Hobbs says. "Before, you could go and follow the same script all day."

Hobbs expects his biggest challenge will be the continued pressure by environmentalists to ban pesticides from a "purely emotional" standpoint. Hobbs says RISE wants to help more golf course superintendents get involved in sticking up for their pesticide and fertilizer use, especially if environmentalists are protesting their use of the products.

"It's our responsibility to give them the resources, the talking points and tools they need to be grassroots advocates and be engaged in this dialogue," he says.

He says superintendents have shown a willingness to unite with RISE to stand up against environmental groups.

"I've been impressed with how eager and willing superintendents are to participate," Hobbs says.

Hobbs advice to superintendents is to "be aware and be involved." Hobbs realizes superintendents are busy and work a lot of hours during the golf season, but they'll benefit themselves and their profession by

staying alert of what's going on in their communities.

It's no secret that some superintendents want to reduce pesticide and fertilizer use, even if they're using such products safely and responsibly. Hobbs attributes superintendents wanting to reduce inputs to their perception of public dialogue calling for reduced use and an outright ban on pesticide and fertilizer use. It's cases like this that prompted RISE to begin Debug the Myths, an educational program that aims to separate fact from fiction regarding pesticides and fertilizers.

"There's really not this tidal wave of activism to say you have to reduce inputs," Hobbs says. "It's a small group of people who are very vocal and good at being loud." ■



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— AARON HOBBS