

# Applicator Bob Wright Tells How He Tries To Make a Profit

By ROBERT G. WRIGHT, Owner  
Precision Spraying  
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**A** QUARTER-CENTURY as an independent custom applicator has taught me many lessons; a few bitter, many sweet.

Having made my share of mistakes, I consider myself an authority on what *not* to do, and reasonably knowledgeable on some things *to do*.

Considering there are more than 600 chemical compounds that are used in excess of 60,000 pest control formulations, it's small wonder there are thousands of textbooks, fact sheets, technical bulletins and magazine articles covering the subject.

My thoughts for this article, however, stray from any technical or scientific endeavor. They pertain, rather, to the pleasant but sometimes difficult chore of making money as a custom applicator.

## Profit Factors

The most important factors involved in squeezing out some profit, in my opinion, are: Diversity, advertising, pricing, and quality control.

Let's look at diversity.

As dependent as we are upon weather conditions, with such brief periods in which to work each season, with further limitations by pest life cycles . . . it's vital that we chase more than dandelions.

Our season begins with early dormant spraying of ornamentals and shade trees. Once frost is out of the ground, non-selective vegetation control—or the so-called soil sterilization—activities begin. Because

this work may be stopped by wind or rain, we do considerable fertilizing of turf, shrubs and trees. We prefer granular applications of slow-release fertilizers. We also make liquid applications, that can be done in almost any kind of weather, utilizing our hydraulic spraying equipment.

At about the same time—but extending into early cover spraying of trees and shrubs—we do battle with crabgrass. This activity also can be conducted in bad weather because neither wind nor rain affect the efficiency of the chemicals used.

Broadleaf weed control comes on strong next. Before this is over, we're knee-deep in spraying for disease and insect control of deciduous trees and mite control on evergreens.

During late summer and fall, broadleaf weed control and non-selective vegetation control resumes. In late fall, we're fertilizing everything in sight.

For good measure, we dabble in the bat, bee and flea business!

## Advertising

I'm not about to offer a short  
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Robert Wright, left, owner of Precision Spraying, Wayzata, Minn., and Ed Sorgatz, field representative for Geigy Agricultural Chemicals Corp., consult the layout of a herbicide demonstration at the Savage, Minn., facilities of Continental Grain Company. Twenty-three plots are under test, and will be reviewed at a public clinic and tour in June.





## ***Geigy Uses 'Maxi-Plot' To Introduce Herbicides***

By ED SORGATZ  
Field Representative  
Geigy Agricultural Chemicals Corp.

**F**ANTASTIC potential exists in the industrial weed control business. Our question was: How could this potential be developed?

With seven triazine herbicides, our company felt it had one of the most versatile and effective lines of soil sterilants for industrial weed control. Yet sales of these products had been small in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area relative to the acreage that should be treated.

One primary reason was that we had been involved in a rather explosive corn herbicide market in the Midwest. Most of our effort had gone in this direction. As this market matured and solidified, we turned more attention to industrial weed control.

Introduction of our products to potential users in the Twin Cities area became a major objective for 1969.

With hundreds of potential users, individual calls were not feasible.

We decided the greatest number of people could be reached in the least amount of time by establishing a large-scale industrial weed control demonstration. We planned to follow through with an industrial weed control clinic and tour of the plots.

Custom chemical applicator Bob Wright, owner of Precision Spraying, Wayzata, Minn., was consulted for advice on locating the demonstration. He selected a site that exhibited characteristics that would test the maximum capability of ours and competitive companies' products.

## Custom Applicator Bob Wright

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course in advertising—rather, just a few merchandising hints that have proved beneficial.

1. Use sharp looking, clean equipment. Put a brief advertising message on your vehicles.

2. Even if business is so good you can't handle another job, keep advertising. You may be able to shrink your trade area. None of us makes a dime driving down the street.

3. Try various advertising media and then ask each customer why he selected your firm. You'll soon learn where best to spend that important advertising dollar.

### Pricing

Pricing the job can be tough—and costly. A printed price schedule on every service offered is wise. List unit prices for broadleaf weed control, soil sterilization, crabgrass control, fertilizing, and so on. Our unit prices decrease as the size of the job increases.

On each job, we count, measure or pace the units in question. We check the price list and quote the total cost. This method is fair to all customers, and is the equivalent of hanging a price tag on our merchandise. This minimizes guess-work, argument and second-guessing the next time the customer calls.

We don't pass these price lists to our customers, but our local competitor is welcome to a copy. We want him to charge as much as we do!

### Quality Control

With those 600 chemical compounds and 60,000 formulations plus the custom applicator's ability to create an infinite number of his own formulations, quality control has to be a complex—if not bewildering—aspect of our business.

Obviously, we've got to know quite a bit about the materials we work with. Chemical houses, salesmen, technical bulletins, etc., are all very helpful. But the fact remains that

the results *you* obtain with the local conditions *you* encounter with *your* equipment using *your* methods of application play a vital role in determining the quality of your work.

### The Continental Caper

Two years ago, Ed Sorgatz of Geigy Agricultural Chemicals Corporation asked if we would be interested in putting out some test plots of his company's non-selective herbicides.

Upon learning that he was thinking of a truly large-plot test to be applied under field conditions, I jumped at the chance. As Ed's description of this project indicates, this demonstration was no 100-sq. ft. scientifically controlled show piece to prove that a product could kill vegetation.

The site selected was that of one of our customers who had a genuine problem. We didn't wait for ideal working or weather conditions. In fact, the first applications came late in the year, and it was snowing. Organic matter was piled here and there. There were a number of box-cars on the trackage to be treated.

This job was handled as though it were another day's work in the life of a custom applicator. We covered the several acres working rapidly with both booms and hand guns. We measured our chemicals carefully and watched our rates per acre. Simply routine. We tried various rates with many different chemicals. We followed up at different seasons with additional formulations.

### The Crux of the Plot

To me, the most important benefit of the demonstration is this:

We've gone back many times to inspect our handiwork. Ed knows, I know, and the many interested people who came to the field day know the effectiveness of the materials we used.

At *those* times of year, using *those* chemicals, with *those* soil con-

ditions, with *those* weeds and *those* methods of application, we obtained *specific* results. The results are varied—but they're there!

The very same plots established in an arid portion of the West Coast—or anywhere else, for that matter—would have produced different results.

As sound as the advice might be from your county agent, from the Department of Agriculture, university, or chemical salesman, that advice necessarily must be general in nature to cover maximum conditions.

Each case of pest control, however, is unique. As an oldtimer once told me: "Circumstances alter cases."

I don't mean custom applicators should become a bunch of "mad scientists" experimenting wildly. To quote another oldtimer, offended at my mixing 2,4-D with 2,4,5-T instead of buying his pre-mixed brush killer: "Remember, Bob, you're an applicator, not a fabricator."

Seriously, don't do anything with chemicals that could conceivably be harmful to any living thing you don't wish to destroy. Don't ever use any material not on the recommended list and for its intended purpose.

In the hundreds of times I've used such a common material as low-volatile 2,4-D, I'm always fascinated by the results.

I inspect as many of our jobs as I possibly can. Occasionally, these inspections prompt me to drop a chemical or change its exact formulation, or make some other modification.

If we all would inspect as many of our jobs as humanly possible, we would accomplish many things. Sometimes, we would be able to go to a less expensive chemical. We would retain more old customers and make new ones. We certainly would improve our quality. Emphatically, we would make more money!

Here are some close looks at Wright's spray equipment. His spray unit is made by the Minnesota-Wanner Company and is powered by a 9 h.p. Briggs Stratton engine. His pump is rated at 20 gpm at 1,000 psi. The lower pictures show what kind of spray pattern he gets from his broadcast tip. His jeep units are equipped to do either hand or boom work. The picture at right shows the value of a "front-view" mirror. From the driver's seat, Wright can watch the operation of the front-mounted boom, noting stoppages immediately. Without the mirror, Wright, said, it would be possible to travel quite a distance without knowing no herbicide was being applied.

