

## Survey shows customers want and need more information on organic programs

### The big challenges to an organic lawn care business are customer education and straight talk about results.

■ Organic lawn care programs take time. First there's the time it takes before an organic program shows results on a client's lawn.

Then comes customer education: customers should know what they're getting for their money.

Brent Flory, president of Freedom Lawns, Delphi, Ind., is tackling both challenges at once. As a man with a background in agriculture, he continues to experiment to find the best agronomic approach for each individual lawn problem. As a businessman, he strives to educate his customers about the difference between chemical and—as he describes it—"pesticide-free" applications.

Like any good fact-finder, Flory recently surveyed a majority of his customer base to learn for himself how they rate the service he offers at Freedom Lawns. He hopes to share his findings with others interested in the natural lawn care market, but for now, he's working on his own learning curve.

"I'm satisfied there is a very useful place for organic lawn care at this time," says Flory. "I am also convinced we need much more research."

**Partners**—Flory's goal is a "partnership" with his customers, one founded on customer awareness and approval of organic lawn care.

The biggest challenge he faces is in the area of terminology. According to his survey, 68 percent of those surveyed consider a pesticide to be something that

only eradicates insects; 21 percent call a pesticide an environmental hazard.

"Most people do not understand the term, 'pesticide,'" says Flory. "This tells me that the industry is not properly informing the public about what pesticides are. Only three percent considered a pesticide to include a weed-killer. As a result, I must use terms such as 'chemical-free' rather than 'pesticide-free.'"

When asked about the most desirable benefit of the Freedom Lawns service, 68 percent cited the chemical-free feature. Twenty-one percent were more appreciative of a healthy lawn, and eight percent listed three benefits: chemical free, safety and a healthy lawn.

"Several indicated they were pleased," says Flory. "After several years of chemical lawn care, they are now seeing much improvement in their lawns with our organic program."

**But how does it look?**—One customer "summed it up," says Flory. "He said our chemical-free ideas would not be a fair sacrifice if the lawn did not look good. The environment was important to him, but, the package was a benefit only because of pleasing results."

"We can say 'organic' all we want," says Flory, "but without a pretty lawn, what's the benefit?" Other findings included:

- ✓ 22 percent felt the company's techniques needed improvement;
- ✓ 17 percent said they would like more information on organics;
- ✓ 96 percent read the newsletter;
- ✓ more than half the clients surveyed said they're satisfied with service as is.

Flory says the majority of those surveyed prefer direct discussion and recommendations over videos. Several appreciate being given product labels, something Flory suspects is missing from most lawn



Flory: Without a pretty lawn, what's the benefit to the customer?

care companies.

"I have many opportunities to view invoices from other lawn companies," says Flory, and they are often vague as to what materials are being applied. I firmly believe that most homeowners should become informed about what they are buying and how much."

A 1992 Roper/Gallup survey revealed that 57 percent of those surveyed favored environmental restrictions; 80 percent said economic growth and environmental protection were not incompatible goals, but if forced to choose, 59 percent would put the environment first. Results like that convince Flory that there is still a lot of interest in environmental issues.

"Whether we agree with it or not," he says, "we need to become more concerned about the environment since the majority of people place more importance on it than ever before."

—Terry McIver

### IN THIS ISSUE

**Nematode efficacy studied in Scottsdale**  
**The importance of scouting in IPM programs**  
**Predator insects as biological controls**