

Stewardship: it's not an easy subject to address



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We had originally planned a rather lengthy feature article on "stewardship" this month. Alas, one's best-laid plans oft go astray.

The problem we encountered was that not many people—at least basic pesticide manufacturers—were willing to talk about stewardship "for the record." As much as you hear them boast in private conversation about their product stewardship programs, the subject is still publicly somewhat of a sore spot.

One person admitted that most stewardship responsibility lies with pesticide manufacturers.

But "it goes far beyond the product," he continued. "It goes to how it's applied, and how the applicator conveys himself."

The problem, they are saying, isn't with the manufacturers holding up their end of the stewardship "bargain." It's with applicators, who don't often convey the necessary professional image. And manufacturers don't want to come right out and say so, because then

they'd sound self-serving, they'd probably offend some of their customers, and they could lose business.

Another person was critical of the green industry's low-price consciousness.

"Price isn't everything," he said. "The older chemistry, which is cheaper, has some less-than-positive attributes like higher application rates and staining properties that present the wrong image to the homeowner. People applying products have to look beyond what's cheapest."

Thankfully, at least for this column, one person was prepared to go on record. And he—Jamie Breuninger, a technical service representative for DowElanco—made some interesting and valid comments.

"Stewardship is acting responsibly when mak-

ing a pesticide application, and knowing what can happen if something goes wrong," he said.

"For instance, when it's windy and you're considering an application near a school. If there are any doubts in your mind, maybe you should come back."

The main problem with manufacturing, handling and applying pesticides in what's called an "urban environment," of course, is that the public in general doesn't understand pesticides. And the applicator is the person who must educate, not the manufacturer.

"The most effective people talking pesticides to the public are people at the garden centers and lawn care operators," observes Breuninger. "Unfortunately, when we [manufacturers] start talking about safety, people start turning us off."

Here, then, courtesy of DowElanco, are some messages you can take to your "public," whomever that may be:

- ▶ Only one in 20,000 pesticides discovered and tested ever receives EPA registration and makes it to the market.
- ▶ From discovery to registration, manufacturers spend 7 to 10 years and \$35-\$50 million on research and development.
- ▶ A single pesticide undergoes more than 120 tests for safety, and every year, new criteria make it increasingly difficult for a product to pass the EPA's screening process.
- ▶ The pesticide industry is second only to the pharmaceutical industry in terms of regulation in America.

"These statements are believable," Breuninger notes. "And it's really important that they be stressed."

"Stewardship," we all know, is the full-lifecycle, cradle-to-grave responsibility to see that pesticides: (1) are manufactured and used correctly; (2) do the tasks they were intended for; and (3) not do more harm than good. Stewardship certainly begins with the manufacturer, but it ends with *you*, the applicator. **LM**

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