



The important thing is that our industry has matured to the point of recognizing our role in helping to solve the environmental equation.

Use “Silent Spring” as a tool

It wasn't until 1959, just five years before biologist Rachel Carson's death, that her controversial book “Silent Spring” was released to the public. Prior to that time, pesticides were considered benign concoctions derived from naturally occurring substances.

Scientists and laymen of the day thought the term “natural” was synonymous with the term “safe.” The passage of time has not altered this assumption, which has been proven questionable.

Growing fear

The public misunderstood organic phosphates partly because they represented a new technology in 1945. I believe formulators thought field test results would help organic phosphates become widely accepted and used beyond the scope of the “naturals.”

By the early 1960s, however, “Silent Spring” was quickly becoming what many believed to be a guiding truth about various insecticides, and those industries and institutions that relied upon their use.

Carson portrayed the dark side of pesticides, and it's clear that her intent was to incite fear, especially when she writes that pesticides are the “elixir of death” and “500 times more deadly to children.” Her objection to DDT, dieldrin, toxaphene and heptachlor condemns their use and convinces readers that they might have disastrous effects on humans.

Faulty conclusions?

I believe that “Silent Spring” is a well written book, but we all must question the validity of many of its negative statements about pesticides.

Is “Silent Spring” as relevant today as it was in 1959? After 40 years, it's obviously not as well read as it was, but its message hasn't lost any of its warning or force, particularly to readers unfamiliar with pesticides or their proper use.

In 1959, her truth was the only truth out there. But that's not the case today. We're armed with more knowledge and are not as willing to accept “Silent Spring” as the blind truth.

We've also learned that pesticides are tools we can use effectively and to the great advantage of the environment. Our goal is to get that message across with the same force that Carson did in her book.

To help us, we can actually borrow and use some of her own thoughts. For instance, she states, “It is not my contention that chemical insecticides must never be used” and “It is reasonable to suppose that we can apply a broad spectrum insecticide to kill burrowing larval stages of insects, for example, without also killing the good insects.”

Her idea of combining chemical controls and other control methods sounds like Integrated Pest Management (IPM) to me.

Almost there

Thanks to science, technology and education, we have, in fact, fulfilled many of Rachel Carson's dreams. Our industry is truly helping to solve the environmental equation.

Since we all strive for the same truth, let's view Rachel Carson's book for what we have in common with it — preserving and enhancing the environment.

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