

Rising to the challenge

Aaron Hobbs, newly appointed president of RISE (Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment), shares specialty chemicals' top opportunities, obstacles.

BY **MARTY WHITFORD** EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

MW: How does it feel to be selected to serve as president of RISE — Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment — an organization that protects professionals' access to pesticides, herbicides, fungicides and fertilizers?

AH: I'm humbled and honored to take the helm at RISE. I look forward to continuing to serve such an exciting and thought-leading industry, working closely with RISE's board and volunteer leaders to build upon the many successes of this association.

MW: How does it feel to try and fill the shoes of Allen James, who retired earlier this month after serving as RISE's first and only helmsman for the past 19 years?

AH: I certainly have big shoes to fill. But I'm excited to take the reigns from Allen. I worked closely with Allen the past 18 months, and we have a very strong board and group of volunteer leaders at RISE.

MW: James is confident you're up to the task of succeeding him. He said you bring a plethora of experience on regulatory and legislative fronts that he didn't possess when he took RISE's presidency in 1991. When and from where did you receive your undergraduate and graduate degrees, and what were your core studies?

AH: Originally from Texas, I earned a master's and a bachelor's of science in agricultural economics from the great Texas A&M University. I complemented these studies with myriad political science and public speaking classes.

MW: What positions have you held since earning your master's?

AH: I've had the opportunity to work in two of the three branches of the government. I've worked on two presidential campaigns, which gave me a firsthand, on-the-ground understanding of grassroots efforts. During the 2008 presidential campaign, I served as national grassroots coordinator for one of the candidates, as well as spokesperson for constituents. Before that, I ran the state government affairs program for the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation. That gave me a real appreciation for the similarities and differences in politics in different states and cities.

MW: Did working as an economist for the federal government during the George W. Bush administration give you an insider's perspective?

AH: Yes. So much of what we do at RISE to support our members and their customers is dealing with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Just having experience working within another federal agency, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, will be extremely helpful.

MW: As RISE's director of legislative affairs and grassroots outreach for the past 18 months, you've seen our industry's strengths and weaknesses. What do you view as RISE's top three opportunities and obstacles?

AH: Our top three opportunities are connecting with customers, connect-



ing with policymakers and continuing to work for industry unity. I see our ability to address these three opportunities heightened through RISE's new public relations/public-facing outreach campaign, "Debug the Myths," which educates consumers, policymakers and others within the industry on the many benefits of our products.

I don't think we can talk about obstacles without talking about the economy. The economy continues to be an issue for everyone. We built our industry and its products on science, but science continues to erode and be misused. Another hurdle is ensuring industry unity while municipalities and other policymaking bodies come after our individual segments and chip away at the corners of our industry.

MW: What are three musts regarding grassroots outreach?

AH: We must "show up" — be there locally, in person, and make return visits. We also must help the public understand how issues affect them and give them resources to effectively speak to their policymakers. Thirdly, we must remember policymakers are human; in fact, often they don't have the depth of knowledge on specialty chemicals that we do. **LM**