

## **ENVIRONMENTAL OPPORTUNITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR THE 90's.**

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### **Introduction**

Entering my third decade in the fertilizer and chemical business, I am amazed at how different each decade has been. During the early 70's the most important challenge we faced was feeding the world. We helped American agriculture go on a production binge, proving we had the capacity to produce what the world needed but lacked the resources to buy and distribute. We, of course, became awash in grain and during the early 1980's, we along with our customers, fought for our very survival. We have been on a twenty year roller coaster ride and have really had little control over the peaks and valleys caused by political and economic policy and, in all probability, we may have little control over these factors during the next twenty years.

In the 90's there is a new challenge facing our industry but it is different from the political and economic challenges of the past. The new challenge is protecting the environment and we, as fertilizer and chemical dealers, along with the rest of the industry have the opportunity and the responsibility to help steer the roller coaster.

Iowa, of course, is one of the leading states in developing an environmental format. We, as Iowans and agricultural supply people, can have a direct impact on how and what is needed to protect our environment and our businesses.

The environmental issues of the 90's will offer many opportunities to a dealers business. We will become more professional. We will make better, more concise recommendations. We will help our producers keep better records. We will, along with our customers, be responsible for our environment.

As Iowa fertilizer and chemical dealers, we are faced with many issues that we can become involved with to protect and improve our environment. What are some of these issues?

### **Pesticide Container Management:**

In the Spring of 1990 the Iowa Fertilizer and Chemical Association, working with a grant from the EPA, initiated a pilot program to manage and recycle pesticide containers. We need at least another year of work with this program before considering the alternatives of deposits on pesticide containers and or using dealer sights as collection points.

As dealers we need to encourage manufacturers to move toward small reusable designated containers. Encourage bulk handling whenever possible, making sure that the manufacturer and/or dealer controls the mini bulk container. When smaller containers are used, such as two and a half gallon jugs, we must continue to educate the customer on the proper rinsing and disposal of these containers. We need to be able to defend our position on container management. Many people don't realize how the container issue is changing with the use of bulk, custom application and new low rate, extremely low human toxicity products.

### **Nitrates In Ground And Surface Waters?**

The 1987 ground water bill laid the ground work for research and education in ground and surface waters. Iowa needs to continue this approach. As dealers we need to make use of new nitrogen management tools such as the late Spring nitrate test. As dealers it is our responsibility to make sure that the nitrogen and other products we sell are used at the proper rates, the proper time and applied accurately and concisely. An argument I often hear is that nitrates come from many sources. Why are they always picking on us? Remember the nitrogen we sell can be regulated while most other sources cannot. Be responsible. Help your customer be responsible with animal waste, lagoon credits and use reasonable yield goals. Insist upon proper nitrogen management.

### **Pesticides In Ground Water.**

We need to support the Secretary of Agriculture and Land Stewardship's plan to manage specific pesticides in vulnerable areas thru Pesticide Management Plans. This is a realistic, effective and manageable approach to reducing ground water contamination.

As dealers we need to make sure the pesticides we sell are properly mixed, applied and the excesses properly disposed of. Take a responsible active role in providing your customers the proper information on pesticides. Let them know that, when used properly, they are safe and, of course, beneficial. Remember, your customers consider you and your dealership a prime source of information regarding inputs and farming practices. Help them to realize the best of best management practices.

Most of us in Iowa have complied with the rules and regulations concerning diking and containment. We now have that peace of mind that our plants are environmentally safe. We sleep better at night knowing our chemicals are contained. Our loadout pads are also wash pads where all water can be caught and reused. We have come a very long way in a few short years toward making our plants environmentally sound. But a major responsibility may

be facing the Iowa fertilizer and chemical dealer, that of the environmental clean up of dealer sites. A group of industry, association staff and dealers have been meeting for over a year trying to come up with a reasonable plan for site clean up. It now looks like a clean up program might have to be legislated. This program would provide a reasonable and acceptable priority for monitoring and site assessment. It would create a state clean up fund from a fee on fertilizer and ag chemicals. It would require a cost share with the responsible party and would deal with past practices, not future occurrences. More study needs to be done concerning this issue to achieve a solvable problem.

### **Dealer Professionalism**

The role of the fertilizer dealer will change more over the next five to ten years than it has during the last twenty five years. Bio-tech, ounces instead of pounds, parts per trillion, integrated pest management, scouting program, soil nitrate testing, cross compliance, continuing education hours, managing inputs for environmental reasons not just economic; these terms and expressions most of us had not even thought of ten to fifteen years ago. Today, they are common place and we, as dealers, must become more professional to meet the environmental challenges of the 90's.

We, as dealers, need the help of industry, universities and other schools of higher education in training and educating our employees and ourselves. Together, we can meet the challenge and turn environmental responsibilities into opportunities.