



The Test Plot or the Testimonial

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The marketing blitz has started. It happens every spring and is as predictable as the return of the robins. New products appear on the scene with a variety of wonderful claims that will improve yields and do other good things.

This year is no exception. In fact, stimulated by higher fertilizer prices, the activity appears to have increased this year. It's only natural that there are questions as these new products appear on the scene. Are these products for real? Will they perform as advertised? Are they registered for sale? Have they been tested? Are they worth the money?

There are some common characteristics of the marketing blitzes for these new products. The products have seldom been tested by independent agencies and/or organizations. The testing is done by the company that is selling the product and, of course, the testing shows that use of the product always increases yields. The testimonials tell of wonderful results when the product(s) have been used in other states. Any of these characteristics should serve as a "red flag" to be cautious.

When considering the use of the "new" products, it helps to think back and remember. Remember ACA, Assett, and Amisorb? These products hit the market with fantastic claims about root growth and yield. Like the traveling salesmen of days gone by, they were here one day and gone the next. The new "miracle" products that have arrived on the scene this year will probably disappear after one or two growing seasons. Here today and gone tomorrow.

It would take a major effort to evaluate via field trials the sales claims of every "new" product that comes on the scene. We can, however, learn from the past. Over the years, various Land Grant universities have used field trials to evaluate the effectiveness of biological stimulants, enzymes, seaweed extracts, and bacterial additives. With the exception of the Rhizobia species used for legume inoculation none have been effective in increasing crop yields. Nothing has changed. These "magical ingredients" are packaged under another name with new claims. Should the change in name change the effectiveness? No!

Crop producers faced with the marketing blitz can get help from several sources. Ag professionals who are Certified Crop Advisors and are not involved with the selling of these products can provide an objective evaluation. Advice and evaluation is also available at County Extension Offices and Regional Extension Centers. Hopefully, ag professionals who are affiliated with the Certified Crop Advisor program and have signed a "Code of Ethics" are not involved in the sale of these products. It would not be ethical to promote the sale of an unknown product that is being marketed without registration in Minnesota.

Over the years, advice about the use of these non-conventional/non-traditional products has not changed. Always, always ask questions before writing the check. Keeping the money in the pocket of the grower will keep it out of the pocket of the traveling salesman.

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