Using Best Management Practices (BMPS) to Stay in Business—A Political Primer

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Abstract. Although new to the Green Industries, BMPS are an established concept for Florida agricultural industries, including citrus, cow/calf, and silviculture. The overall goal of any BMP is to provide guidelines to conserve and protect Florida’s water. The expectation of the industry was less need for local fertilizer ordinances, which are becoming more common. All stakeholders had be part of the process for the BMP document to be accepted and useful. Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs), are being set for each level of impairment, and the first one reviewed for turfgrass was phosphorus. From that, grew the BMPS for Green Industries’. Groups that participated in the writing included: Department of Agriculture, Department of Environmental Protection, several water management districts, University of Florida IFAS, Department of Community Affairs, and industry. The first publication of this living document was both time consuming and expanded the point of views of all participants. Not only was new information shared and accepted but the group eventually came to agreements or compromises on all parts of the manual. There are several important groups that now need to be educated: the industry itself, the clients who use landscaping services (including property managers), city and county governments, and the general public. The most difficult support to gain has been local governments. Too often, personal appearances before local boards is required to get acceptance of the State Green Industries’ Best Management Practices.

The Green Industries Best Management Practices (GIBMPs) first began with a local fertilizer ordinance passed in January 2000 that shocked the industry. The ordinance was passed without the contribution of either science or a respect for the need for consistency in a route-driven business that frequently crosses county and city lines. The industry became aware of this ordinance that regulated rates, sources, and timings of fertilizers in one part of Florida. The professionals formed the Florida Pesticide Applicators Alliance, with the intent of taking emotion out of the process, and replacing it with science and reason.

The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) approached the industry in Spring 2000 on a similar situation in the C-11 basin bordering the Everglades. With the help of Peg McPherson with SFWMD, the industry worked with interested stakeholders on the C-11 BMPS. Other parties included Institute of Food and Agriculture (IFAS), Department of Community Affairs (DCA), Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACS), and Broward County Department of Environmental Protection. Once this document was completed, the group began work on the state GIBMPs. Since there are over 60 counties and over 400 municipalities in Florida, both the industry and state bodies saw the need for consistency.

Unlike agriculture, whose BMPS are endorsed through the Department of Agriculture, urban BMPS are completed under the Department of Environmental Protection. Dr. Mike Thomas was liaison with DEP and provided technical expertise and guided the group through the process of writing a document that a diverse industry could accept. All participants received an education on how both industry and the numerous governmental bodies operate. The history of water quality laws, TMDLs, fertilizer usage, the complex science of growing plants, chemical storage, buffer zones were all topics that required long discussions and compromise. The GIBMPs were completed in June 2002 and are readily available.

Unlike agricultural industries, the greens industries is not only highly visible to the public, but often must educate their clients on their part in the BMP process. Such activities as mowing, irrigation, design, and plant selection may not be a factor the green industry company fully controls. This adds an additional layer to the educational process, which is ongoing. Dr. Laurie Trenholm, with IFAS, heads the GIBMP education process, which is ongoing. The largest challenge is to capture the attention of both large and small companies, and owner/operators that are unaware of the GIBMPs.

Local governments have been another challenge. While fertilizer usage can be regulated at a local level, the technical knowledge is often not sufficient to write an ordinance that is enforceable and works to solve a specific problem. The industry has found that many local governments write regulations that not only would not help solve their specific concern, but restricts the natural ebb and flow of an industry that travels freely within geographic boundaries. The industry and various state agencies and bodies are working to bring science into these discussions and remove emotion.

In conclusion, the GIBMPs are a document written by all stakeholders. While endorsed by the DEP, the industry has yet to find it universally accepted by local governments. This is one of the final tasks in the BMP process, along with continual education of our members.