

Value And Efficacy

Industry experts discuss the latest in fungicides and the biggest challenges growers are facing as they work to feed an ever-increasing world population.

GROWERS are faced with the daunting task of feeding a growing population. To successfully do that often requires that they know the best uses of various crop protectants to not only get the most for their money but to avoid resistance issues, as well.

In the area of disease control, AVG caught up with Marcus Meadows-Smith, AgraQuest CEO, and Sarah Reiter, the company's marketing director, as well as Troy Bettner, senior marketing manager/Southern regional business manager at MANA Crop Protection, to get their thoughts on future products, resistance problems, and disease control issues impacting growers. Here is what they had to say.

What is the biggest battle growers have with disease control?

■ **REITER:** The biggest issues growers have to deal with include having enough tools to profitably grow their crop. In the future, growers will be faced with fewer and fewer fungicides to use. This is due, in part, because regulators like the European Union are cancelling active ingredient registrations or withdrawing the allowances of tolerances. Food retailers too are limiting the chemistries which can be used. So even if the product is registered here, a grower's option to use [the product] may be taken away because he is trying to export that commodity where the tolerance isn't allowed or the residue level is extremely low.

■ **BETTNER:** The biggest battle growers face in battling disease control in specialty crops is optimal spray timing for control and the best solution. It takes good scouting and recognition of environmental factors that are conducive for diseases to determine the problem and when to spray.

When developing fungicides, what are the key attributes you are looking for?

■ **MEADOWS-SMITH:** Our

basic stance is that we bring something to market that is as good or better than existing standards for disease control. We are also looking more and more into increasing yields. So, often times it's disease control, but it also is disease control and absolute profitability for the grower.

You also have to remember that any product we come out with has to have a positive impact on the environment, as well. We believe that regulators and consumers demand less toxic products and that concept fits well in our pipeline of biopesticide products.

In fact, we're introducing now a new product, Serenade Soil, that is based on the same active ingredient as Serenade (*Bacillus subtilis* strain QST 713). Right now, growers use Serenade for foliar applications. The active ingredient also is very strong in soil disease control. This year, Serenade Soil will be used for soil applications at planting in potatoes, tomatoes, and cucurbits with expansions planned beyond that.

What do growers tell you they need in disease control products?

■ **REITER:** Growers are looking for products to help them avoid having resistance issues. Right now, we think growers are practicing good, strong resistance management, and they are doing that by rotating chemistries and using tank mixtures and we want to further that. One of the things about resistance management that might be difficult for some growers to understand is that while they rotate products, and alternate their chemistries, they may be choosing two chemistries from the same class of chemistry. We need them to choose two totally different classes of chemistry so the products aren't acting on the same receptors inside the fungi.

What role does sustainability play in crop protection?

■ **MEADOWS-SMITH:** Ag has to be sustainable by nature. There are some bad practices around the world, such as slash and burn agriculture, but for the most part growers live on the land and they plan to leave it to their children so they have a sustainable attitude already.



Troy Bettner



Marcus Meadows-Smith



Sarah Reiter

We plug into and support sustainable agriculture. I owned a small farm in the United Kingdom, and when you are farming you expect to live on the farm your entire life. Your desire is to leave it to the next generation, and I think a lot of growers think that way.

■ **REITER:** Mainstream consumers are clearly more aware of production practices than they ever have been. This is due, in large part, to the politicization of food. I think that the drive toward sustainability will inevitably force changes on agricultural production. Today, growers have many valuable tools to produce crops. AgraQuest's goal is to provide growers with the kinds of tools that will allow them to leave the world a little better than they found it.

■ **BETTNER:** Sustainability is such a relative term right now. It has so many different definitions for different people. I think it has a fit, but in the scale of production that is required to feed the world, it simply cannot be implemented across a large scale.

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