

Are We There Yet?

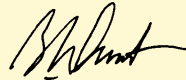
More than 25 years separate me and Pat from the car trips we took with the kids. I'd be hard pressed to give much detail about any of those adventures, short or long. But there's one burning question that was common to all of them. "Are we there yet?" The interrogation usually began well before the "I have to go to the bathroom" phase took hold and grew more intense as we worked our way into the trip. Time has softened my remembrance of the aggravation that question caused. Truthfully, I would welcome the opportunity to answer it again...maybe more gently and patiently.

Now I find myself thinking about agriculture and wondering, "Are we there yet?" Sadly, I have to admit that we're not and won't be for some time to come.

Where is 'there' and why can't agriculture reach it? 'There' is agriculture's being recognized as the supplier of the most basic of man's necessities. Food. 'There' is agriculture's being appreciated as a group of men and women dedicated to feeding the world while protecting our natural resources of air, water and soil. 'There' is agriculture's being accepted as a part of the common community, doing its share...in the best way it knows how...to sustain the quality of life on this planet we all share.

The fertilizer industry, being a part of agriculture, isn't 'there' either. Far from it. A recent article in the *Globe and Mail*, Canada's national newspaper, made reference to the fact that U.S. farmers went easy on fertilizer use last year – "so they're all set to slather on the sinister gunk this year." I wonder if the writer knew that over a third of the food we produce in North America and perhaps 75 percent of that in some developing countries can be attributed to the use of that 'sinister gunk'. Dr. Tom Bruulsema, PPI's director for eastern Canada and the northeastern U.S., offered a credible rebuttal to the article when he wrote, "Is nourishing the soil to nourish the world a sinister activity? The farmers of North America deserve better credit."

Farmers do deserve better credit. So do agriculture and the fertilizer industry. If more of us would take the initiative, as did Dr. Bruulsema, perhaps that credit would eventually come. Then we could answer yes to the question, "Are we there yet?"



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