

PERCEPTION VERSUS REALITY

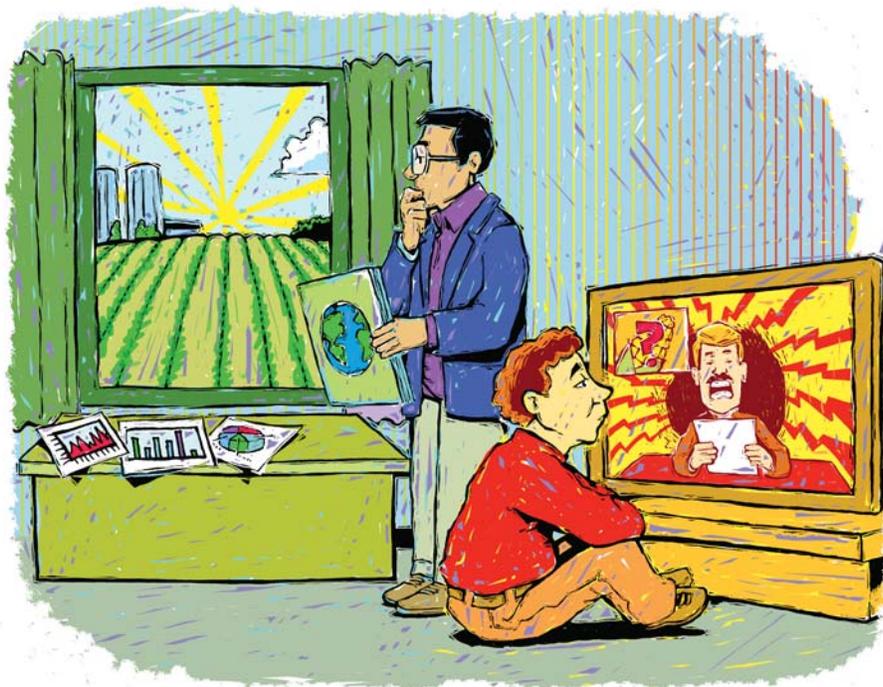
Perception is the way we think about or understand something. It is derived from our senses—sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell. It is objective. Perspective is how we interpret the things we perceive. It is derived from our emotions, beliefs, attitudes, values, and experiences. It is subjective and influenced by others. If we trust someone, like a role model, or if someone is famous we often take what he or she says at face value.

As an agricultural scientist I struggle with those whose perspective is more influenced by other's opinions than by facts, especially when it comes to the critical role fertilizer plays in global food security. We know that about half the world's food production is possible because of the use of commercial fertilizers, and about half the people who have lived on this earth owe their existence to the use of nitrogen fixed by the Haber-Bosch process. Data, research, and reviews of the published scientific literature tell us this.

My reviewing of scientific papers on fertilizers and crop production, my first-hand observing crop response to fertilization, my seeing crop yields double and triple in the developing world with the application of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium, my hearing smallholder farmers express their gratitude for access to fertilizer, and numerous other experiences leads to my perception about fertilizers. My background and experience makes me view fertilizers positively. Scientific evidence also tells me that fertilizers used inefficiently or ineffectively can cause problems in our environment. But the evidence also tells me that the good outweighs the bad and the problems are manageable with proper nutrient management.

Why is it that most people's perspectives on fertilizer are negative? I believe they don't see the good they do ... only the bad. It's because most people are either unaware or misinformed, or disconnected from the realities of global food production. They have a false perception based on misleading or inaccurate information. Their perception is their reality and that is difficult to change. But, it can be done.

As people get to know and understand the true value of fertilizers, as they understand what our industry is doing with 4R Nutrient Stewardship, and as we gain the public's trust we can change their perspectives. We are going to add another 2.3 billion people to this world in the next 35 years and we are going to have to produce at least 60% more food to feed them. That can't be done without fertilizer and it won't be easy without the public's confidence in our ability to manage fertilizers responsibly.



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