

## PUBLIC POLICY...AND FERTILIZERS

Generally speaking, a good part of my ethnic background is what many refer to as ‘Pennsylvania Dutch’, early Germanic settlers in America who eschew worldly lifestyles. I’m fond of one of their sayings, which translates into English as:

“Too soon old, too late smart.”

**You ask: What does that have to do with public policy and fertilizers?** Concerning the efforts of the crop nutrient industry and its partners in research and education around the world to convey the value and benefits of crop nutrients ... fertilizers ... to the public, we have been “too late smart.” Possibly it’s only me.

**Recently, I have come to the realization that rather than leading an argument with ‘Fertilizers are good because they...improve food security, farmer income, etc.’, I might have been more effective by reversing the elements of the argument, by first addressing the issue of concern to the public.** After all, isn’t the public most interested in having a sufficient, diverse, and wholesome food supply offered at reasonable prices. And isn’t society more keenly interested in having a healthy rural economy so farmers have the wherewithal to provide the food we need as well as to secure the vast landscape they have stewardship over, so it can be enjoyed by countless generations to come...than talking about fertilizers? And after all, aren’t fertilizers a means to a good and noble end...not the end itself?

**My point is: We have battled on and about fertilizers...and not very convincingly...to the public.** There is another way, a smarter way. I may claim “too soon old, too late smart”, but I trust there are many younger, more vital, and smarter ‘fertilizer people’ among the research, education, and industrial communities who understand. First, address the issues of public concern, of public policy...then explain fertilizer’s role and its effectiveness. This piece is purposely titled: *Public Policy...and Fertilizers*. In that order, please.

**Work smart. Be effective.**



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