



“

A study conducted for the Canadian Fertilizer Products Forum says that a move toward a third party standards based system for fertilizer quality would be a prudent consideration.”

”

Industry Standards

Like many sectors, the fertilizer and supplement industry faces increased demands for guarantees of product safety, quality, security and environmental sustainability. A study conducted for the Canadian Fertilizer Products Forum says that a move toward a third party standards based system for fertilizer quality would be a prudent consideration. It would be a good way to provide market assurance to customers and would allow regulators to concentrate on those areas that only they can undertake like product registration, while leaving testing and monitoring to industry that meet the criteria.

“

The CFIA administers a number of Acts and Regulations that, together, are designed to safeguard our food supply, protect the health of animals and plants and enhance the well-being of Canada's people, environment and economy.”

Currently, fertilizers and supplements are regulated by the federal Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA). The CFIA administers a number of Acts and Regulations that, together, are designed to safeguard our food supply, protect the health of animals and plants and enhance the well-being of Canada's people, environment and economy. Fertilizers and supplements sold in Canada are regulated by the CFIA under the authority of the Fertilizers Act and Regulations.

The Fertilizers Act and Regulations require that all regulated fertilizer and supplement products must be effective and safe for humans, plants, animals and the environment. They must also be properly labeled. The mandate of the CFIA's Fertilizer Program covers a wide range of products sold for agricultural, commercial, and home and garden purposes. The manufacture, proper use and safe disposal of these products are controlled by provincial and municipal rules and regulations. The CFIA works together with provinces and municipalities



to ensure that all fertilizers and supplements meet the highest standards for safety and efficacy.

In addition to current government regulations, industry has also taken the initiative to develop and implement its own standards, Best Management Practices and certification programs in response to growing customer interest.

Because of the work already being done by the industry, the study points out that the development of third party standards systems “would not likely be an onerous initiative. As with all such undertakings, the specific and ongoing costs of compliance are borne by the individual manufacturer or processor,” the study says. “(They will) determine whether it is of benefit to participate in the scheme.”

A standard, however, is most effective if all manufacturers and suppliers adhered to it, the study observed. Gaining their endorsement largely comes down to “ensuring that the need and the cost must approach the benefit.” The variety of products listed under fertilizers, however, could make development of a standard a major challenge.

Quality assurance programs in the agri-food sector in Canada and abroad offer potential models for the design of a third party standards based program, the study points out.

Getting companies certified is a manageable task because CFIA has designated third parties to deliver and/or issue certifications in other quality assurance programs such as the Fertilizer Safety and Security Council and the Right Product@ Right Rate, Right Time, Right Place® environmental stewardship initiative endorsed by the Canadian Fertilizer Institute and the Crop Nutrients Council in Canada.

Companies producing inoculants and supplements might also consider using an International Organization for Standardization (ISO) standard and the Good Manufacturing Practices, Good Laboratory Practices and Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) processes. These programs frequently use third party audit and certification combined with internationally recognized accreditation.

In addition to current government regulations, industry has also taken the initiative to develop and implement its own standards, Best Management Practices and certification programs in response to growing customer interest.”

A quality standard set by industry would be voluntary but if established effectively, it would be to the financial advantage of a company to belong to it. It could also mean “that by not participating the company and or its products are not recognized as being legitimate and may be shut out by other participants in the value chain—effectively removing it from the marketplace,” the study observes.

An industry developed third party standard could also benefit government, the study says. It could increase public confidence in a product, add credibility to a regulatory system (especially with third party auditing) and reduce cost to government by decreasing the amount of inspection and oversight for a product.

Research by the Conference Board of Canada on quality standards in all sectors found that they have the potential to demonstrate to consumers that products are ethically produced. Standards can also set the stage for continuous improvement of products required to maintain certification and “an opportunity to drive costs and waste levels down while improving product quality and customer satisfaction.” National standards could have other benefits for industry, the study found. It would enshrine, through third party auditing or other practices, the notion of conformity assessment for fertilizer products. That would not only provide the kinds of assurances consumers are seeking but could boost the export potential of products that adhere to the standard. Conformity assessment is

recognized by the World Trade Organization for its role in assuring that specified requirements relating to a product, process, system, person or body are fulfilled. Usually the purchaser or a third party ensures the conformity requirements are met.

At the moment, there are two government recognized fertilizer quality related programs—the Canadian Fertilizer Quality Assurance Program (CFQAP) and the Canadian Compost Standards program. In addition, the inoculants sector has quality programs that are broader in scope because they relate to the manufacturing process as it leads to a final product.

A national standard would appeal to farmers and other customers because they would have more confidence in the products they purchase. As well, it would show that the industry is working to develop products that will assist farmers.”

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency runs the CFQAP program but it is currently under review. The Agency and a significant number of industry representatives acknowledge that the program is not achieving its goals in terms of cost-effectiveness, compliance or sampling accuracy. There





is general agreement that it needs to be revamped or replaced. The regulators are willing to consider an alternative program that has general industry consensus. Since most fertilizer companies already have their own internal standards to ensure the quality of their blended products, an improved CFQAP program would demonstrate industry diligence already taking place.

The Compost Standards program is a voluntary third party process run by the Canadian Compost Council. The program backs up the regulatory requirements. In its current form, it is a stand alone program but its outcomes could be incorporated under a broader umbrella program that would include other fertilizer products meeting appropriate standards.

A national standard would appeal to farmers and other customers because they would have more confidence in the products they purchase. As well, it would show that the industry is working to develop products that will assist farmers.

The industry has plenty of examples to choose from in determining the kind of third party quality standards that it wants. A third party standards based system would be in addition to the work of the Canadian Food Inspection

Agency and current industry initiatives already underway. The industry would benefit, according to the report, because “having a common mark or certification could be used to promote the positive attributes of their products which can provide greater customer certainty, loyalty and greater sales.”

Contact Us

Canadian Fertilizer Products Forum
350 Sparks Street, Suite 802
Ottawa, ON K1R 7S5
Email: info@cfpf-fcpf.ca
Web: www.cfpf-fcpf.ca

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) is pleased to participate in the production of this publication. AAFC is committed to working with our industry partners to increase public awareness of the importance of the agri-food industry to Canada. Opinions expressed in this document are those of the Canadian Fertilizer Products Forum and are not necessarily those of the Department.