

Insignia[®] fungicide creates disease service opportunity

Disease is a potential problem on any turf, but while preventive fungicide treatments are routine on golf courses and sports turf, fungicide applications too often are seen as a tough-sell situation for lawn care professionals.

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One hurdle in lawn care is selling more customers on the need to protect their turf against a potentially serious problem. Unfortunately, if disease strikes and decimates a lawn, the problem becomes explaining why the disease outbreak was not prevented and the cost to restore the lawn.

Fungicide treatments also pose challenges on the technical side. Unlike golf course superintendents, who are on their turf every day and can monitor disease conditions constantly, lawn care professionals may only see a customer's lawn once every six weeks or fewer, depending on their current service plan. This makes residual protection an important benefit for lawn care companies.

While on a golf course the superintendent can select the most effective fungicide for a specific disease, the lawn care operator requires a broad-spectrum fungicide that acts to control the disease and provides residual protection to the turfgrass that supports plant health and increases turf vigor.

What has made all these considerations especially frustrating for turf professionals is knowing that disease prevention is a valuable service for customers who have a significant investment in their lawns and landscapes. Protecting that lawn investment increases customers' satisfaction while increasing revenue within the existing customer base.

What has been missing for many lawn care professionals is a broad-spectrum fungicide that offers the residual protection necessary to fit into a lawn care service schedule.

BASF has responded to this need with a fungicide that finally makes disease prevention practical for lawn care companies. Now registered for lawn applications by the EPA, and by 48 states (registration pending in Hawaii and California) Insignia® fungicide is labeled for use on more than 15 turf diseases and offers up to four weeks of residual protection. Additionally, this fungicide can provide curative activity for specific turf diseases such as Pythium blight, brown patch and leaf spot.

Insignia® Fungicide is labeled for use on more than 15 turf diseases and offers long-lasting control—up to 28 days with a single application. At just \$6.28 per 1,000 square feet of turf, it offers lawn care companies an efficient, broad-spectrum solution to meet disease control needs.

“Insignia has been field tested in university trials for more than seven years and demos were held on golf courses for two years,” says Kyle Miller, senior technical specialist with BASF. “In 2003, it was registered for use on golf courses and has now undergone significant real-world use in that market. What makes this fungicide ideal for lawn care is it has excellent residual. Lawn care companies need a product that offers protection for up to 28 days, not a week or two.”

Another important benefit, Miller adds, is that Insignia prevents brown patch, dollar spot, Pythium blight and all the major diseases common to both warm- and cool-season grasses.

“The active ingredient is pyraclostrobin, a proprietary BASF compound that is active on most turf diseases,” he says. “The active ingredient acts as a respiration inhibitor that is effective against the disease during all growth stages of the fungi. For the lawn care operator that means that one product is effective on a wide range of diseases. Insignia is safe for all warm- and cool-season turf when used according to label directions. All these benefits make Insignia a solid foundational product for a lawn care disease control service program.”

Miller says the active ingredient, pyraclostrobin, a strobilurin (QoI), is a relatively new class of fungicide. The other strobilurin fungicides in the same chemical class

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15 turf diseases and single application. At are operators an challenges.

have little or no activity on dollar spot, an important turf disease.

Another product advantage for lawn care professionals are the label options. Insignia is formulated as a 20 percent WG (water dispersible granule) which can be applied at a rate of 0.5 oz. to 0.9 oz. per 1,000 square feet, depending upon the disease concern or the severity.

“With a number of turf diseases, the active ingredient also has a curative effect,” Miller says. “So, if you already have disease present, it can be applied to control the disease and prevent it from reoccurring.

“The label rate options are also important in lawn care because the higher rates provide the longer residual needed,” Miller adds. “At the same time even the higher label rates are low in active ingredient in comparison to a number of other fungicides. Using less active ingredient reduces concern about possible pesticide loading in the environment.”

Selling plant protection

Disease prevention and control is increasing among lawn care companies at a double-digit rate, according to research done by *Lawn & Landscape* magazine*. Lawn care companies surveyed in early 2004 reported that fungicide treatments increased an average of 21 percent from 2002 to 2003, and that they were expected to increase by

more than 15 percent in 2004.

A number of factors explain the increasing importance of disease control as a service. Negative weather triggers disease conditions. Increasing use of irrigation on residential properties can create wet conditions that favor disease outbreaks, especially if it is misused. Ever-rising expectations of property owners make tolerance of disease less acceptable. And greater investment in turf makes it more important to protect the investment.

Like grub control, fungicide treatments are best sold and applied on a preventive basis. Customer calls about a disease outbreak usually mean it's too late. So, selling the service requires educating customers on the nature of the problem – that the right conditions will trigger certain diseases – and the potential cost. In an extreme case, Pythium blight can devastate a lawn before a curative treatment can be made.

“Unfortunately turf disease is not something that can be prevented with integrated pest management (IPM),” Miller says. “IPM can reduce the likelihood of disease, but is not effective at preventing disease because even the healthiest turfgrass is susceptible under the right conditions. What fungicides do, especially preventive applications, is ensure plant health. Failure to prevent disease means damage costs, so it really can be a ‘pay me now or pay me later’ scenario.”

It's easier to sell fungicide treatments as an add-on service by monitoring the conditions that can trigger disease. One tool is to maintain historical records in a local area or even on a property to see when a problem occurred and which disease was the culprit. With this information it is possible to predict disease problems and offer customers preventive treatments when similar conditions exist.

Some state universities have created modeling systems to monitor disease risk factors, such as moisture levels and temperatures, to predict problem conditions, and post the information online.

“Disease control is becoming a more important service for lawn care companies as either a component of their standard service program or as an add-on service,” Miller says. “Newer fungicide tools, such as Insignia, make it possible to include this service on a preventive basis along with standard service calls.”

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