

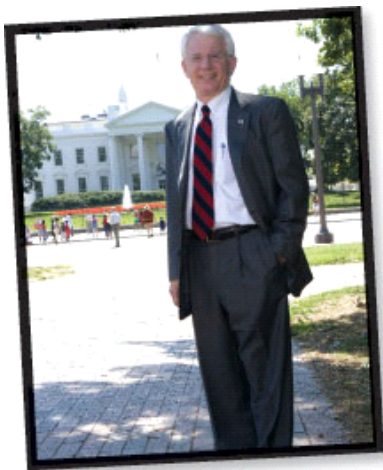
GROWERTALKS

Columns

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ANLA: Bob's View: Reasons to Rejoice

Bob Dolibois



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My last column was entitled "Reasons to Fuss." In case you missed it, here's a short recap.

Excerpting my presentation at the recent Seeley Conference, I stated that three of the industry's common reasons for shrugging off pressure to change our practices and become more sustainable no longer hold water:

Excuse #1: "We ARE the Green Industry." No, we're not ... at least as far as how some of our customers, advocates of green industries and, especially our adversaries, apply the term "green." Green means windmills, electric cars and fluorescent light bulbs, not chlorophyll. (Resource: Google)

Excuse #2: "We are the 'Original Environmentalists.'" Uh-huh. Lot of good that does us. The Post Office was the Original Internet, too.

Excuse #3: "I don't have time for that stuff. It's spring." True. But the industry is increasingly in a full-time, multi-front battle to preserve our access to fundamental inputs for producing and maintaining our products: water, fertilizer, energy (human and generated), pesticides (for ornamental plants) and bark/peat. Continued access to these finite, fearsome or sacred elements means winning those rights over other users that are better organized, better financed and better connected than our industry is currently.

My final observation in that column is that life is not a hamburger, and we can't always have it our way.

That said, my formal name is Robert, not Jeremiah. So in this column let's move to some reasons to rejoice about our circumstances relating to increased scrutiny and pressure to be more sustainable.

Rejoice #1: We're better off than many other industries. Compared to other sectors of agriculture, the floriculture and nursery sector is already "greener." Our crop value-per-acre, our waste stream, IPM and other practices put us in a favorable position to defend more of what we're doing today.

Rejoice #2: “White hat” businesses. Again, compared to some industries, we’re viewed more positively as current or potential enhancers of our community. Most people either want us around or tolerate our businesses as being more benign than some others.

Rejoice #3: Less radical change needed. The two rejoices above substantiate why being more sustainable means less change than we may imagine. We can keep doing much of what we do now. We need to modify some of what we do now. We need to discontinue less of what we do than you may think. And in the process, we’ll discover new things that really work.

Rejoice #4: We no longer have any choice. We’re in the midst of a flat or declining market for our status quo products and practices (or soon will be). There is an alternative, though. The shift from the status quo to a “greening” of the urban setting has market-building opportunities in terms of renovation and repurposing the role of chlorophyll in urban infrastructure, interior and exterior.

Rejoice #5: There is payback for sustainability. Among the testimonials I hear from the businesses that have experimented with more sustainable practices, the ratio of successes-to-failures is very favorable. Those changes that are unique to our production methods (in contrast to changes that rely on temporary subsidies or in which we compete with others for finite advantage) have so far proven most beneficial.

Bean counters, take heart. If the net is less, it ain’t truly sustainable.

Payback can also come in the form of intangibles. Many employees in our industry are attracted by the “natural world” and sustainable practices can engender pride and bragging rights ... leading to worker satisfaction and retention. Some of such current or future employees may be your children or your exit strategy or both.

Rejoice #6: We may have a LITTLE more time to adjust. This lousy economy has deflated some of the more grandiose ambitions to remake how the post-industrial society handles its interaction with the earth and climate. At the same time, be aware that there is a counterforce at work that may lead to more command-and-control demands and less voluntary self-regulation.

You’ll note that the number of rejoices outnumber, by a factor of two, the excuses that no longer have traction. That means there are at least twice as many reasons to do the right thing. Seems to me, that is reason(s) enough. **GT**

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