

# Where Are You? Where Do You Want to Go? How Do You Get There?

**The above questions** really hold true to just about everyone at some point or another. Point is: how often do we ask ourselves these things? In the news recently, Lumber Liquidators has been getting hammered for illegally importing wood from forests that are home to endangered species. A federal judge has ordered them to pay \$13.15 million in penalties and five years probation. Another big hit they are taking is some of the flooring they sell has been tested for having high amounts of formaldehyde. So Lumber Liquidators finds themselves at a crossroads.

Where are they now? They were caught. Where do they want to go? We will see, based on their actions. How are they going to get there? Sometimes, this determines where someone decides to go. Some of us take the cheap way out and then wonder how we got to the place we end up.

In our industry, do we ask where or how some of the products we use are manufactured? It is partially our responsibility. So now might be a good time to pull out the big business plan (you do have one, right?) and ask the above questions. What are some of your business' short- and long-term goals?

Do you want to reduce use of conventional chemistry, move toward organic status, or just do a better job and increase your profit margin? The first step is to identify the goal and then to assess the possible changes that might lead you there. The second step is to see if there are areas you can improve in scouting, culture of the crop and even choice of products based on their cost effectiveness.

Few growers have approached disease control in a systematic way. Start with gathering independent opinions about each new product. Most of us just gravitate toward the newest product without knowing whether or not it works or how it compares to industry standards. Let's face it, deciding if

a fungicide works is not as easy as deciding if a PGR or insecticide works. You cannot see the result sometimes until it is too late. And there are so many things that can make a disease outbreak slow down or stop. Everything from weather changes to sanitation to spacing the crop can actually stop disease progress.

If you want to reduce use of conventional pesticides, you need to determine if there are any biological control agents (BCAs), biopesticides or reduced risk materials that can take the place of something you are now using. Sometimes there are no alternatives, but most of the time you can find something a little better if you know where to look. Ask other growers, university experts and private consultants how something new to you will work. Sometimes you can even ask them to help you figure out how to move forward — how to rotate, what to avoid and how to tell if things are going well. These types of changes are not successful as a cookie cutter approach since each solution will be unique to a specific operation. Choosing the right sources of information is sometimes the best way to figure out how to reach your goals.

Once you decide where you want to go, you can determine what will be the biggest problem that might keep you from getting there. Sometimes it is something small, but sometimes it will be costly. Even more often, what seems to be the problem may turn out to be minimal while the real problem might be educating your employees. One of the hardest things is having all employees on board and having them understand the importance of the questions.

The above questions might be based on monthly or quarterly sales, how about employee incentives or something out of production or even budgets. Remember that this type of change won't happen over night. But if you do not start now it will surely not happen at all.

Taking risks in your business should be part of the plan. You just need to figure out what your risk tolerance is and put it into effect. If you're uncomfortable, start small. If you are interested in trying a new product, try a test area first. If you need to make a change in your daily business procedures, try something for a few days or a week and see how it goes before you make it a standard. And remember that making a change does not have to be permanent. If something does not work, change it again!

When we arrive at a crossroad, we each have a decision to make ... which way to go. Once we choose a direction and go, will you be good with it? Sometimes we're dealt with hard choices that we need to make, hopefully we make the right ones! **gpn**

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*Chase Agricultural Consulting, LLC was formed in 2011 by Ann (A.R.) Chase and Mike Zemke. Ann has more than 35 years experience in research, diagnostics and practical consulting in plant pathology. She has been retired from the University of Florida since 1994 but remains on staff as a Professor Emeritus. Mike holds an Associate of Applied Science in manufacturing drafting and started his education in horticulture when he and Ann were married in 1995. He specializes in communications of all sorts within the industry.*