

Quality — It Matters

This is a topic I can take personally after spending 20 years in machining and dealing with very tight tolerances. Now, having been in the horticulture industry for 20 years, I can't seem to just let quality slide.

Say you've been using the same seed type and source for years and you've been dealing with your normal good/bad percentages, consistency issues and maybe even sourcing difficulties. Then over the next several months you find yourself dealing with a lot more problems. Now what? Do you keep dealing with all the bad seed or look for a new supplier? What are you going to do? You are now at a crossroad.

EVERYONE'S JOB

In machining, there is very little or no room for error, depending on the job. Quality is something that is included from the start, it cannot be added in later. Quality is everyone's job and has to remain in the entire process (like producing a crop) until the customer receives their shipment.

You cannot have plants start with good seed and then have somebody in the middle of the process cut corners and hand off the plants to somebody in the end to ship. The quality is no longer part of the product.

Quality doesn't only apply in our industry; it should apply in all industries. Nearly always quality comes with a cost. Think about in our daily lives all the

things we do. We make purchases, we build, assemble, etc. A lot of quality has been put into each step so the final product is high quality, reliable and what the customer demands.

Take for instance some of the pots that I've seen with extra sharp plastic edges on them that would end up cutting you or your customers. Is this something you pass on to your customers? Are you using a cheaper media mix with high expectations hoping for magic? How is it that we expect something to hold up or do a job with very little or next to no quality built into it!

QUALITY AND CROP INPUTS

Moving on to crop inputs like fertilizer and pesticides — Ann's area. I know many of us would like to believe that less costly fungicides are exactly as effective as their brand name counterparts. We don't want to pay premium prices unless we see premium results — and maybe not even then.

In the case of fungicides, they may be less costly because the manufacturer has not maintained use of high-quality inputs. Maybe the adjuvants and other "inerts" are changed in type or

rate and the results are simply not up to the trade name products' levels that you are used to. How much actual testing is done on the crops to ensure nothing damaged the safety of the product? You cannot always substitute one product for another without assuming some risk either to the crop safety or the ability of the product to work.

IMPLEMENT A FORMAL PROCESS

Consider starting a formal process to make sure your quality is on target throughout the production process.

- Keep an up-to-date inventory of the materials you need.
- Test potting medium and water.
- Make sure your equipment is calibrated frequently.
- Do a trial run of a new crop or seed source.
- Test a new fungicide or insecticide for crop safety — you could even compare to an older brand name product.
- If you have a new shipper, test them by doing a trial run.
- Make sure your boxes/shipping racks are up to the job.
- Check expiration dates on your chemical inputs like pesticides.
- Test and train your people to make sure they understand your expectations of them.
- Make sure you give your employees the right tools. If they need gloves and the ones you supply are too small or fall apart, nobody will be using the gloves.
- Keep records — if you don't have a formalized way to show that you have a quality process you don't have one.

Remember quality is everyone's job. The most important thing is that your name is on your product. Supplying something that is lower quality or missing market windows due to quality problems always costs your company money. After all is said and done — you really do get what you pay for. [gpn](#)



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.