Common'Tater Interview with:

Steve Rosenthal

by Tamas Houlihan, Managing Editor

Name: Steve Rosenthal
Title: Executive Vice-president
Organization: TH Agri-Chemicals, Inc.
Location: Plainfield, WI
Hometown: Sheboygan, WI
Current Residence: Plover, WI
Years in present position: 24
Previous employment: Thompson-Hayward Chemical
Schooling: UW-Oshkosh
Major: Accounting
Hobbies: Golf, Teasing my significant other's (Ardis Winters) grandchildren.

If you've grown potatoes in Wisconsin for any length of time, chances are you know Steve Rosenthal.

Steve has worked with TH Agri-Chemicals, Inc., since it was incorporated on June 1, 1982. The company was purchased from Thompson-Hayward Chemical by Robert Zimpel (President) and Rosenthal (Vice-President). The company is headquartered in Plainfield, but opened a new facility in lower Michigan (Union City) in 2005, and is servicing Michigan and Indiana from that location. TH also established an internet cash and carry option in recent years.

TH Agri-Chemicals distributes agricultural chemicals in both package and bulk. According to Rosenthal, "our mission at TH is to provide our customers with the best products at economical prices with service that is outstanding." The motto at TH is "good people to grow with."

An experienced professional in the area of crop protection, Rosenthal serves on the WPVGA Associate Division Board of Directors, as well as the Wisconsin Christmas Tree Association Board. A graduate of UW-Oshkosh with a major in Accounting, Steve has been very active on WPVGA committees and has been instrumental in various fundraising activities. In the following interview, he shares his thoughts on a number of issues related to crop protection.

"New chemistries to fight Colorado Potato Beetles are very close to being marketed. Possible alternatives to fumigation are being looked at closely."

In the interest of crop protection, it's very important to get the potatoes off to a good start. What steps do you recommend growers take to ensure a healthy start for a potato crop?

I feel that a good potato crop starts long before planting. Purchasing the best quality seed potatoes is very important. I sell chemicals to seed growers in this state and Michigan and I see the extra care they take in raising a crop and this care needs to continue at the end user level.

Sanitation and disinfecting of equipment used in the cutting, handling and planting operation is essential. Planting in the best possible soil conditions is also important.

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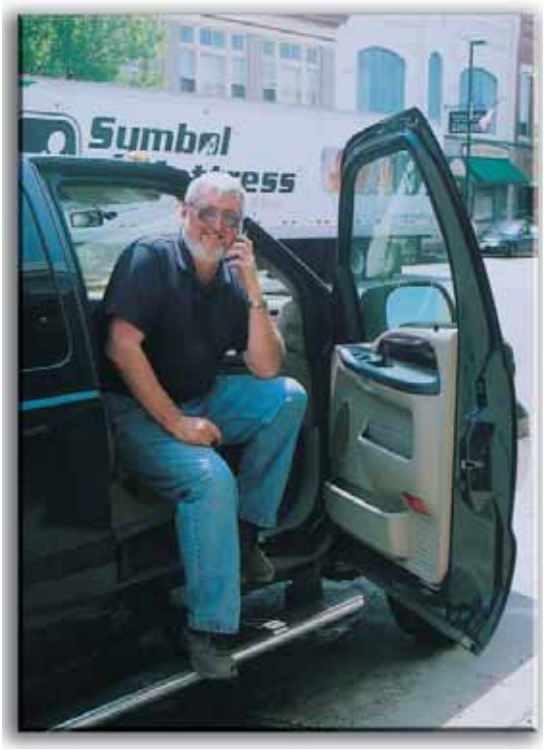

What are your thoughts on in-furrow seed treatments?

The practice of in-furrow seed treatments has improved and simplified the potato growing process. This practice has also reduced exposure of the employees to the chemicals. Growers have reduced the amount of insecticides sprayed later by using these products.

The use of seed treatments has changed in recent years to liquid fungicides and water soluble fungicides that are sprayed in the furrow or directly on the seed. I feel that seed treatments are good insurance against problems that could develop later.

What are your recommendations for a strong early blight/late blight protection program?

Early and late blight recommendations from our sales people start with the monitoring of severity values, P-days and weather conditions which can be found on the UW Plant Pathology web site. I like to start with a mancozeb program at first if the weather is dry and switch to a combination mancozeb/chlorothalonil and then to chlorothalonil treatments. I will follow the state recommendations and also put in additional early and late blight products listed in the commercial vegetable grower manual. If wet weather persists I like to recommend increasing the rate of fungicide and shortening the spray interval.

I feel growers have done a great job in being stewards of our crops and this has resulted in eliminating late blight in the past few years. Destroying cull piles, spraying around the edges of aerial sprayed fields with a ground rig and removing over-hanging trees has all helped.

How do you think Wisconsin growers are dealing with pesticide resistance management?

Pesticide resistance is a problem world-wide. I feel Wisconsin growers are very concerned and have done an excellent job addressing this issue. Wisconsin has the best educational programs available in the nation. The university and extension system training and educational meetings are a must to attend and keep up-to-date on these issues.

Growers are always asking about rotation of chemical groups and if new chemistries are available. Our company personnel attend all the meetings that growers do as well as meetings put on by the manufacturers. We also invite our suppliers in for extensive multi-day meetings to educate and update our team at TH. Open communication between the grower, the supplier, the manufacturer, extension and university people, and pest scouting personnel, will help slow pesticide resistance.

Are there any new, exciting crop protection products on the market this season? Are there any on the horizon?

Growers and sales people are always excited about new products to grow better crops. New products give us a chance to learn and interact with each other and discuss new ideas.

We have been working with a number of new products recently. Georgia Pacific has developed a new slow-release nitrogen product (30%) called Nitamin. The product is broken down by soil microorganisms and is not subject to leaching from heavy rains. The product will last 60-70 days and is ideal for crops such as potatoes and carrots.

We have also been working with a product that increases set on seed potatoes as well as increasing yield on fresh market potatoes. The product has also been shown to reduce common scab in scab susceptible varieties. Eden Biosciences has developed this product called Messenger STS. The product is a harpin protein which when applied to a growing plant, triggers that plant's natural immunity system and wards off the attack.

There are a few new products that are in the pipeline. New chemistries to fight Colorado Potato Beetles are very close to being marketed. Possible alternatives to fumigation are being looked at closely. Complete soil and tissue tests with almost immediate analysis are very close. The horizon looks bright for new alternative products. ◆