

Barnyard's Organic Alternative

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PORTSMOUTH -- If Pure Barnyard, a local business, was looking for a new slogan to promote its lawn and garden products, it might go something like this:

"Organic. It's not just for food anymore."

But even as it is, the marketing line the company has currently employed is a clever one.

Pure Barnyard is the purveyor of chemical-free, earth-friendly weed killer and fertilizer, sold under the name Cockadoodle Doo. The "doo" is literal -- the fertilizer is made using dried chicken manure, which provides high levels of nutrients.

And the slogan? "DOO the right thing."

Within the last decade, organically grown food -- absent of chemicals, preservatives and artificial flavorings -- has made its way out of health food stores and onto more and more shelves at traditional supermarkets. Now, says Pure Barnyard's chief operating officer, Ian Grant, it's time for organic yard products to follow suit.

"People are starting to turn to organic. You can't burn your lawn, you can't over use it. There's no worry about pets, kids," Grant says. "You can put it down and let the kids go out."

Pure Barnyard was founded in 1998 by John Packard. Last year it was a two-person operation. After raising \$2.25 million in investment capital in 2004, it has grown to 12 full-time and 15 to 20 seasonal employees.

The fertilizer, the result of a partnership with the chicken grower Perdue, is nutrient rich and contains three percent calcium. Iowa State holds the patent for the weed controller, made from corn gluten meal. Presently, Pure Barnyards is working on liquid fertilizers.

"Ten years ago, organic food was found mostly in small co-ops. Then it started going more mainstream," Grant says. "Organic fertilizer is probably eight years behind."

According to Grant, lawn and garden products are a \$40 billion industry. He describes the organic side of the business as "very fractured."

"The ground has been broken by organic foods," Grant says. "Because of awareness, the volume of interest has grown -- no pun intended -- organically in the last two years."

Still, people don't always think about using something other than chemicals, he says, or they don't know they have an alternative. But the word is getting out, including at Pure Barnyard's more than 1,600 retailers.

Golf courses, landscape businesses, sports centers and municipalities have made the switch. Lowe's home improvement stores in Delaware and Maryland are testing the market with the Portsmouth company's products. "Getting into Lowe's allows us to advertise more and reach more people," Grant says.

Sagamore-Hampton Golf Course in North Hampton, Rolling Green Nursery in Greenland, Boston Parks and Recreation, the Harvard School of Business and Dreams Park in Cooperstown, N.Y., all use Cockadoodle Doo.

Says Rick Simpson of Rolling Green Nursery, "I think organics are the way to go. People are much more comfortable handling something like that. If they have to do something, they want to do it the safest way."

Grant is convinced all it takes is getting people to try the natural products. Chemicals have to be reapplied, roughly every 10 to 30 days, he says. Cockadoodle Doo last up to 90 days. So, while it's more expensive per bag -- about \$25 for a 40-pound bag of fertilizer -- it lasts longer.

"Bag to bag, it's more expensive, but if you look at the use life, the numbers go down. It works so well, once people try it, they're hooked," Grant says. And with the product's slow-release over three months, the plants can pull from the fertilizer what they need, he adds.

Simpson says, "In the chemical fertilizer world, they all have special mixes. These products like Cockadoodle Doo can be used for perennials, trees, shrubs. It's a very simple way to do something other than chemical."

And while Grant concedes that going up against long established companies like Scott is like "facing an 800-pound gorilla," he says Pure Barnyard (www.purebarnyard.com) is beginning to hold its own.

Grant calls attention to those "little flags that warn people to stay off the lawn for three days."

"We like those little white flags. We're the opposite of that."

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