

BioGreen Concept on the Grow



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LC0 turned manufacturer John Perry builds unique natural fertilizer licensing model

Envision a product that evokes images of happy children and scampering puppies while utilizing cutting-edge technology to achieve results that are both green and sustainable.



Most of the clients of BioGreen services are homeowners although most licensees also do a fair number of commercial properties and golf courses, too.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BIOGREEN.

It sounds like a can't-miss formula, and John Perry, founder and president of BioGreen USA, Inc., and his licensees hope that proves to be the case.

Perry started in business with a traditional spraying service in Reno, Nev. However, to set himself apart, he based his business model on not using conventional fertilizer, instead relying on products from a small Idaho company that specialized in the agricultural market.

From there, he chose to focus on developing his own turf-related products, and began manufacturing in 2007. (The manufacturing business relocated to Kearney, Neb., in 2010 to cut shipping costs due to its centralized location.)

"Today, we're a product manufacturer operating a business model for license," Perry says. "We have what would be similar to a franchise except we don't charge anything to become a BioGreen licensee. We also co-brand with companies so that they don't have to change their existing image."

The benefit of that approach, Perry explains, is that many people who contact him already have relationships with companies that build sprayers or trucks

or other industry-specific units, which they can continue to use.

"They can also determine how they want to spend money on advertising in their area," he says. "Because we're the manufacturer of the products they use, we don't have to charge additional fees because they're buying direct from us anyhow.

Marketing help available

"Ultimately, it makes them more competitive in the marketplace."



The company's bold message is evident as its service vehicles also serve as mobile billboards and tout the product's environmentally friendly nature.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SCOTT TREVISAN/BIOGREEN CHARLOTTE.

Not that BioGreen doesn't assist in advertising or marketing. The company has its own in-house facilities for print design, audio recording and television production. It's also developed a presence in trade magazines, as well as at national tradeshow, and is a member of numerous nursery and landscape associations.

It's BioGreen's own advertising that sold Lance Pignato on the concept. The owner of the Stuart, Fla.-based Florida BioGreen had owned his own lawn spray company for several years before selling it and relocating to Georgia and a new career as a builder/developer in 2002.



Then, the bottom dropped out of the housing market.

"I headed back to Florida to make ends meet and pay my bills," Pignato explains. "One night I was lying on the couch watching the Outdoor Channel, and I saw an infomercial for BioGreen. I went to the computer and inquired about it, and as soon as I hit the 'send' button, my phone rang.

"I've been involved with BioGreen ever since."

Pignato says for him, a large part of BioGreen's appeal is that its products represent a new technology – and one that doesn't rely on foreign oil, chlorine or other harsh chemicals to get the job done. He compares it to what's going on in the automotive industry with cars getting greater gas mileage while being better for the environment.



BioGreen licensees are encouraged to maintain the existing relationships they have with their other suppliers and to choose their own equipment. Even so, the BioGreen message is still boldly evident on licensees' service vehicles.

"It's the same way with fertilizer technology," he says. "We've got something that's cleaner, that's more efficient, that grows a healthier plant, a sweeter plant, and one that's more resistant to weed and insect pressure, as well as drought."

Regulatory issues on the rise

Perry says when he first began to look into natural fertilizers it was seen as a fringe idea that few people took seriously. Today, thanks in part to legislation focusing on fertilizer use on turfgrass, that has changed.

“People are seeing problems, or they have to face legislative changes in how they can fertilize,” Perry explains. “Minnesota has had a zero phosphorus requirement for close to eight years now. Florida limits the amount of nutrients that can go down annually, and certain counties there are making it even tighter.”

In those cases, BioGreen offers products formulated specifically for blackout periods so licensees can continue to operate. In total, the company offers about a dozen different products, which are sold strictly through the licensees.

“Our core includes our 5-0-1 Pro Turf Nutrition, which is used generally by the golf industry and sod growers,” says Perry. “Most of our sprayers use that one, too. Another is our 20+ Micros, which is a higher nitrogen blend. Then, there’s our 0-0-2, which has a complete micronutrient blend and does a really good job of feeding the soil and replenishing nutrients that can get lost easily.”

For sprayers willing to sign up with BioGreen, each licensee is given an area that’s easily defined – based on population density – and required to commit to a product purchase schedule that includes a five-year stepped-up purchase program.

If they meet those goals, they become perpetual licensees.

Pignato, for instance, services all of St. Lucie and Martin counties and the northern half of Palm Beach County on Florida’s southeast coast. In his case, however, he says the opportunity to offer a new product was at least as attractive to him as the protected territory.

That, and how excited people have become over BioGreen.

Initially, Pignato says clients hired Florida BioGreen based on its reputation as a good company.

“At that time, the issue of being all-natural didn’t really come into it,” he says. “But, as we’ve gone along, people see these big trucks wrapped in the blue and green colors of BioGreen, and the graphics say that it’s all natural and bio-based. People started picking up on that, and they also realized their lawn does look better than the neighbor’s.”

Pignato estimates that at least 90 percent of his business comes from word-of-mouth, and today many of those calls mention the natural aspects of BioGreen’s products. The vast majority of them are single-family homeowners, although he says he also has several landscape companies who also use his services.

The other area where BioGreen is making a name for itself is on the golf course. Perry says he prefers his licensees sell BioGreen products directly to course superintendents, and Pignato says at least in his experience not one who has started using BioGreen has cancelled.



BioGreen licensees sell product directly to golf course superintendents. The company manufactures natural fertilizers that are specially formulated for home lawns, golf courses and sod farms. Its plant is in Kearney, Neb.

Perhaps the best testimony to BioGreen's quality is that its licensee and client numbers have continued to grow despite the recession. Perry says the company is seeing an annual growth rate of approximately 110 percent, and he expects by the end of the decade to be in all corners of the United States, with possibly international locations, as well.

Other plans include adding a retail component to the operation and beefing up the company's numbers in the agricultural industry, where BioGreen is enjoying some remarkable success both with row crops and pasture grasses.

"The time will come, absolutely, when the products will be available on a more national scale," says Perry. "However, I wanted to make sure our spray services were well-established, well-known and well-branded before we pushed more into the retail market."

It's then that Perry expects the green side of BioGreen to really become apparent.

"A lot of our clients still have no idea that what we're doing is positively effecting the environment," he says. "They like our service and our results, but they don't know it's a green product, and they certainly don't care they're using 90 percent less nitrogen or any phosphorus."

"Right now, we're changing the face of fertilization without anybody knowing it."

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