

Introduction

ICI Fertilizers had long taken a quality approach to nitrogen fertilizer manufacture on both cost-efficiency and environmental grounds. The company's leading nitrogen brand Nitram was, however, coming under severe market pressure from significantly lower-quality ammonium nitrate imports. To combat this, ICI wished to demonstrate the clear value of its quality product against the competition.

Objective

- Distinguish ICI Fertilizers and its product, Nitram, from its competitors
- Position the product as the quality fertilizer within the market.

Strategy

Company-sponsored research into an innovative three-dimensional system of measuring product spreading accuracy. This was used:

- as the basis for an extended farmer education campaign to establish the precise costs of using inferior products
- to introduce an industry-wide standard for commercial product quality assessment.

To focus attention on the key issues, Mistral produced, launched and promoted a specialist farmers' guide to Accurate Nitrogen Application under the Nitram branding. A survey of farmer attitudes to nitrogen quality and environmental responsibility conducted at

major agricultural events provided further publicity opportunities.

Mistral then developed a unique 1-5 evaluation system – branded as Spread Pattern (SP) Rating – from the research to categorise different products according to their quality and to give a firm financial value. This scheme was launched with the publication of a companion farmers' guide at a major technical press event.

All Nitram product packaging, literature and advertising was subsequently branded with the ultimate SP5 quality rating. Considerable efforts were focused on winning over all sides of the UK fertilizer industry to the system.

Results

Widespread editorial coverage was achieved throughout the main national and regional farming media, initially for the whole issue of fertilizer quality, spreading accuracy and nitrate leaching, and subsequently for the innovative SP rating system.

The printed guides were widely circulated to farmers and opinion formers, through both ICI and its distributors, leading to broad acceptance of SP rating.

The system has been accepted by the industry and adopted as the standard measure of quality by the Fertilizer Manufacturers' Association. The scheme has also been successfully launched in France.

