

WHY ASSOCIATIONS ARE GOOD FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

TEXT LUC MAENE, DIRECTOR GENERAL INTERNATIONAL FERTILIZER ASSOCIATION
PRESIDENT, ESAE

Trade associations play a crucial role with regard to environmental issues. This is especially true for associations representing industrial sectors.

Historically, many trade associations were created to pool expertise about their sectors. In some cases this was economic intelligence, but providing technical know-how to decision makers has long been one of the core roles of associations. Experts gathered in a trade association provide a wealth of experience on how to grapple with complex environmental issues in real-world situations, where trade-offs may be necessary.

In my own organisation, the focus of our Technical Committee has shifted from technology transfer to safety, health and environmental issues.

Associations also play a key role managing the reputation of their sectors with regard to environmental questions. In some cases this means correcting the record when inaccurate information is being cited. At other times, it entails explaining why a one-size-fits-all solution may not be appropriate. This latter case is particularly true for associations that have a wide geographic scope. In the case of the International Fertilizer Industry Association

(IFA), which I head, this could not be truer. Globally, we can agree on the principle that the appropriate fertilizers should be used at the right rate in the right place and at the right time. But what that means in practical terms varies widely depending on the crop being grown, soil conditions, the climate and other factors. Our responsibility to the environment therefore depends on our fighting for recognition of the need to adapt to local conditions.

But the role of associations is not just about defending existing interests.

Because they are removed from their sectors' competitive pressures, associations are well placed to exert leadership in the field of environmental concerns. In a first instance, the association can raise awareness throughout its membership of emerging environmental impacts related to the sector's activities.

An association can collect and disseminate information about these challenges and possible actions to address them. It can provide a platform for dialogue with concerned stakeholders. Associations are also powerful vehicles to highlight best practices, encouraging laggards to emulate leaders in the field. At an advanced stage, an association may create a formal stewardship



LUC MAENE - DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL FERTILIZER ASSOCIATION

programme for its members. Examples range from purely voluntary schemes to mandatory programmes with the risk of penalties - sometimes even exclusion from the association - for those failing to live up to agreed standards. Some associations have even developed certified norms that have spread well beyond their membership as a result of market demands. The certification offered by the Green Building Council in the US is a powerful example of this phenomenon. This standard is now widely quoted in tendering processes across the country.

In this edition of Headquarters, several associations will discuss their environmental activities, giving a flavour of the range of initiatives that exist.