

Jashar locks up soil 'holy trinity'

JOHN Jashar's dynamic natural fertiliser company Guano Australia Pty Ltd has locked up the holy trinity of soil management - nutrients, soil structure and microbiology - in a new distribution deal.

The company, which has achieved phenomenal growth over the past seven years, has secured the Australian distribution rights to the biostimulant Agrispon, manufactured by the Dallas, Texas, based company Agri Sciences.

In announcing the deal, Mr Jashar broadened the appeal of his highly-effective products to the rapidly growing number of sustainable conventional farmers while retaining the high acceptance rating he has earned among organic and biodynamic producers.

"Basically I researched what happened with Agrispon in Australia up until about three years ago," said Mr Jashar.

"I saw it wasn't being traded in Australia in a correct manner.

"I identified that it was not a snake oil, that there was a very good product, but that it required an enormous amount of technical training to the right people.

"Agrispon has got a very big strong fit into sustainable agriculture, not so much the organic side, but true sustainable agriculture.

"I've built a very good working relationship for the very long term with Agsci America, and we are going to be responsible for distributing this product right across Australia on a step by step basis.

"Agrispon is very much a product that will fit into all types of conventional methods for farmers going down the sustainability track, who want to fix up their soil.

"They can get their soil conditioned so that whatever inputs they choose, not only Guano Gold, will open up and release, so that they can grow crops more productively and more sustainably.

"Agrispon is now being officially launched nationally into the Australian market place in order to play its role in rebuilding Australian soils, backed up by a select network of specially trained agronomists and distributors.

"This is not being done for Guano Gold, it's being done for Australian horticulture and agriculture to enhance the farm fertility that is our livelihood."

Agricultural Sciences Inc president Kevin Sinks said in Brisbane: "Our company was started in Dallas, Texas in 1976 by my father Robert, my brother Robert Jun and myself.

"We actually started making Agrispon in our garage back in the early seventies so we could test it on farms, and went into full production in 1978, when Derek Little, marketing manager, and my brother Kim joined the company.

"In '95-96 we decided to restructure the company, realigning the marketing and sales and acquiring new distributors.

"Until then the company had been selling the product, but not marketing it, nor was it training people how to use the product.

"That's how we came across John Jashar.

"We also moved from getting distributors to buy large quantities to providing them with what they needed, because in today's marketplace nobody warehouses anything.

"We re-emphasised education.

"Our marketing manager Derek Little has spent the past 20 years going to trade shows throughout the United States and Central America, training people. Basically he is our educator.

"Since we started the education process, we have seen a steady increase in sales.

"I would say we can attribute a 20 to 22 per cent sales increase to educating people in the use of our product.

"Meanwhile our biggest inhibitor of sales has been a lack of awareness of the product in the market."

Mr Little said: "A lot of people don't know what a biostimulant is, and too many people have been introduced to biostimulants with the wrong approach.

"For instance, if you put Agrispon in the soil and you don't add any nitrogen fertiliser, you can raise a crop fairly well for two years.

"After one year you say, 'Hey! We just raised a crop without any nitrogen fertiliser - we must be fixing nitrogen in the soil'.

"But there's a lot of organic residue in the soil and you can mine it out.

"If you don't replace it, after three years you're going to have crop failure.

"That's where a lot of people will see an early result and take a wrong interpretation of it.

"By the time they realise that it's wrong, it's hurting the client.

"The problem there is bad education.

"The health of soil has to be administered on a whole-of-soil basis.

'... So, treat the problem, not the symptom...'
Derek Little, Agri Sciences

Mr Sinks: "That means that when Agrispon is used, for example, we realised we had to be part of the whole program. It's not the only answer, because otherwise you would get a short-term result."

Agrispon distributes to 16 countries including Colombia, Algeria and Vietnam.

"We just came from Vietnam where the Government has officially announced it will be distributing the products - we've been working in Vietnam since 1994," said Mr Sinks.

"We're now in Australia for the first time, distributing through Kismet International.

"We started negotiations about a year ago and John now has a contract for exclusive rights to Australia.

"We are looking forward to a long-term relationship, and we are very impressed with the network he has set up and the quality of people he works with, the education they put forth, the understanding of our product and the compatibility of his product and ours, the synergy between the two companies."

Mr Sinks and Mr Little have finished touring South Australia and Victoria, and will return in September-October to visit Western Australia and the rest of Australia.

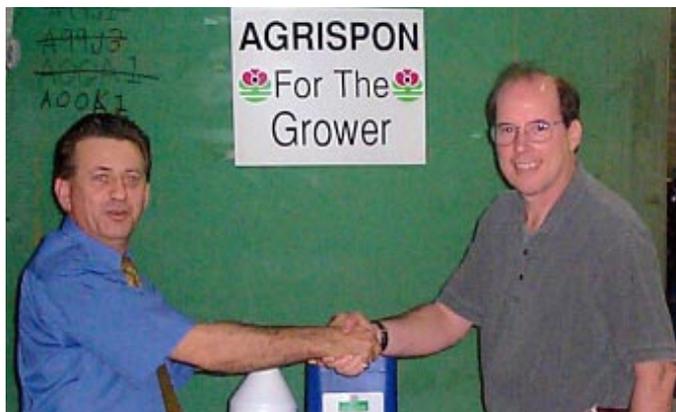
In Brisbane, Mr Little spoke about the company's approach to education on Agrispon.

"To understand how our product works, you need to understand the only problem in agriculture, and that is a loss of biodiversity," he said.

"If you walked out into a field and you



Teamwork takes the biostimulant Agrispon to the top: from left, John Jashar of Guano Australia Pty Ltd; Agri Sciences' marketing manager Derek Little; and Agri Sciences Inc president Kevin Sinks



John Jashar with Kim Sinks at the Agrispon factory in Texas, USA in late August.

saw that it had not been cultivated, you would see a lot of different plants.

"Each one of these plants produces photosynthetic material that is chemically different for each variety of plant.

"Some of that photosynthetic material goes through the roots and stimulates cell division in bacteria, fungi, and algae around the root system.

"Those organisms start releasing enzymes, polysaccharides and siderophores.

"What happens is that through this community of action, the soil stays in balance biologically as well as chemically.

"Whenever we take away biodiversity and put in a monoculture, which is what we have to do to raise crops, from that point on nature is fighting you to get back to biodiversity.

"When I talk about soil fertility, I'm not talking about the nutrients in the soil, I'm talking about the soil's ability to process nutrients.

"As we move away from biodiversity to monoculture, the soil fertility goes down because the different varieties of microorganisms reduce. That's the way nature gets

rid of some plants - it reduces the fertility so other plants will have room to grow.

"Everything else that happens after we put in a monoculture is merely a symptom of that monoculture.

"If you think about it, whenever you have pathogens come in, it's nature's way of taking out some of that monoculture so biodiversity can get in.

When insects take away some of the plants, some biodiversity enters.

"Once you understand that monoculture is the problem, you arrive at the conundrum - you've got to have the monoculture to raise the crops. So, treat the problem, not the symptom.

"Agrispon has four different plant extracts in it, so whenever we put these different extracts into the ground, we are basically recreating biodiversity in the soil.

"We are recreating a diversity, a multiplicity of bacteria, fungi and algae.

"These micro-organisms think all the plants are there.

"We are recreating the biodiversity that increases the fertility, so whenever you put

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The Guano Australia managing director John Jashar with Agronomists in Brisbane, part of the Australia-wide training programme for Agrispon.

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a nutrient source on, the soil can process it, get it into the plant, and take the stress off the plant.

"What happens also is that whenever you increase the biodiversity of micro-organisms in the soil, they start releasing the materials that begin breaking up the soil, putting in air space, all those things that made the soil so good in the first place.

"Before fertilisers came out, farmers used to rotate crops on a three year basis and then let it go fallow - we had biodiversity. "Now because of machinery costs, commodity costs and things like that, we tend to have one crop year after year after year."

Mr Little said the Agrispon education plan in Australia was based on a train-the-trainer method.

"What we've been doing is going around to the various agronomists and educating them on how this type of programme fits in with what they have.

"Distribution in Australia will depend heavily on working in with the agronomists.

"We figure that if we can train the top tier of agronomists, then they can take that education out and train the next tier and so forth, in a trickle-down kind of education.

"We can't get around to everyone, so what we are trying to do is educate educators." Agrispon's product information describes it as a reasonably priced, fully EPA registered biostimulant for soils and plants.

The company says Agrispon is applied at 13oz per acre, or one gallon to 10 acres for all food crops, row crops, landscapes and gardens.

It says the product has been tested and proven worldwide for more than a decade.

Said Mr Little: "Agrispon is a natural, easy to use and cost-efficient biostimulant that dramatically improves plant performance and yield.

"It is effective in any climate suitable for plant growth.

"Agrispon performs especially well where there is stress due to soil or weather conditions.

"Many agronomic practices suppress beneficial micro-organisms and hence limit the nutrient supply to the roots, even in situations where adequate fertiliser has been applied.

"The product enhances nutrient availability and soil structure without any negative environmental impact.

"It's important to distinguish between types of biostimulants.

"Most are byproducts of bacterial cultures, manure extracts, seaweed extracts, or a combination of those.

"They work by increasing the enzyme, vitamin and hormone levels of the soil or plant, so encouraging growth.

"What we say is that Agrispon works in exactly the same way that plants themselves work.

"As a plant grows, nutrients and other elements are converted through photosynthesis into a liquid that is spread to the growing cells, causing division.

"This photosynthetic material is transported throughout the plant, and a portion of it is released from the roots.

"That material is then absorbed by the one-cell plants in the soil that are unable to perform photosynthesis and must rely on the upper plants for the material.

"Once the material is absorbed into the one-cell plants, it causes cell division, resulting in increased populations of these organisms.

"Each plant species produces a photosynthetic material that is unique to its species.

"Certain subspecies of micro-organisms, such as fungi and bacteria, are reliant on the particular type of photosynthetic material, so that the different species of upper plants have groups of lower plants or micro-organisms that are associated with them.

"As the micro-organism populations grow, so does the release of enzymes that free nutrients to the upper plants.

"However, other materials are also released that build soil structure and suppress the pathogens associated with host plants.

"For the suppression mechanism to be effective, a number of materials might need to be combined from populations of various microorganisms from different species of host plants. As a plant goes through its life cycle and active growth stops - as in the case of an annual that has started to produce seed - the photosynthetic material to the micro-organism also stops.

"This allows the pathogens to attack the plant and start the process of decomposition that cycles the nutrients back to the soil."

The company says that although much is made about growing things naturally, the term means, strictly speaking, letting whatever will grow in an area without cultiva-

tion, irrigation or fertilizers.

This would eliminate all agricultural and horticultural production, and trigger a return to a survival system of individual foraging and hunting, the company says.

"Growing a single type of plant in a field or in rows is an unnatural occurrence," said Mr Little.

This includes farming, gardening, and landscaping. In a natural situation, plants will grow with a variety of other plants.

This is called biodiversity.

Each of the plants is naturally selected for the area because they are able to survive the soil and atmospheric conditions of the area.

Because of the biodiversity, the basic mineral and microbial balance is stable.

Even with the periodic fluctuations that occur throughout a growing cycle, over a period of time the growing area stays in an overall equilibrium.

"When plants are grown in an unnatural system, that equilibrium is thrown out of balance.

"This is because only certain minerals and nutrients are pulled out of the growing media during the growing cycle due to a reduction of the biodiversity.

"Even if the used materials are replaced through fertilisers or other practices, fluctuations will occur during that cycle that will not occur in a natural type of growing system."

The company likens the effect to a bowl of M & Ms.

"Let's say that there are four brown ones for every three red ones for every three yellow ones for every one green one," said Mr Little.

"Under a natural situation, a number of people would be eating out of the same bowl that would be matched by their consumption rate and preference for one colour or another.

"They would eat the M & Ms in the proportions 4 brown; 3 red; 3 yellow; and 1 green, and the depletion rate would be consistent.

"But if you let only one individual feed from the bowl, that person will have a preference for one colour or another.

"They will eat all of that colour until it is gone, then move on to their next favourite colour.

"During the exercise, the proportions of one colour to another will change.

"Even if the bowl is replenished with the same number of the colours that were removed, certain fluctuations will have occurred along the way.

"In natural situations, if an imbalance occurs, a number of events take place.

"In an effort to correct the situation, seeds from plants that might have lain dormant for many years are triggered into germinating.

"Due to the loss of equilibrium that kept them from germinating, pathogenic insects and diseases increase to remove some of the specimens of plants that are causing the imbalance.

"Another phenomenon that will occur is a loss of many of the micro-organisms that are responsible for releasing certain nutrients into the available pool for plants to absorb.

"To grow crops, lawns and landscapes, the soil and the plants in it are continually growing in a condition of stress.

"Simply put, the plant extracts in Agrispon send out the message that a biodiverse group of plants is growing there.

"The soil's reaction is to lower the resistance that keeps plants from growing."

The company says that in a comparison test on soil, Agrispon treatment led to an increase in total bacteria, but a decrease in

Industry leaders back Guano and Agrispon

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Bingara Farm Centre is one of the biggest distributors of Guano Gold, having moved more than 600 tonnes in the last 12 months.



But before it got anywhere near his customers, Rob Drewitt tested both Guano Gold and Agrispon on his own crops.

"I used Guano Gold and Agrispon on a mung bean crop. When I saw the results on my own crops, using my own money, I had no problem whatsoever recommending both products," he said.

"What I particular like about Guano Gold is that it is not dusty and it adapts well to a variety of distribution methods. The biggest problem with a lot of other products it actually getting it through the machines. This goes through well on its own or blended.

"I used Agrispon on my crops while surveying surrounding crops. What I found was that when it was dry, my crop didn't prematurely flower like surrounding crops. Then when it did rain very heavily, my crop coped well and made better use of the water.

"This seems to be an advantage of using Guano Gold and Agrispon together. Agrispon comes into its own when it is a hard season. The elements in Agrispon encourage a bigger root system so the plant can take up more water and the soluble silicon in the Guano Gold improves the plant's ability to use that water more efficiently.

"I am in the business of helping farmers develop sustainable management plans, to look at the long-term value of the land. One input won't fix problems if you haven't got the right mindset so we are looking at whole systems.

"I recently visited America to look at this issue. America has enjoyed subsidies for so long that their move to sustainable systems is far greater than ours. We have had to be efficient so we are ahead on sustainability.

"It is not the yield that makes money, it is the gross margin. The highest yield isn't necessarily the most profitable crop."

Rob is continuing to trial Agrispon for himself this season, using it on a contract crop of Sunsoft 98, as well as on sorghum.

Mr Robert Drewitt, Bingarra, NSW

denitrifying bacteria, which meant an increase in the nitrogen fertiliser efficiency rate.

The test also showed an increase in total fungi, which led to more nutrients getting into the plants, particularly phosphorus and moisture, because of the symbiotic relationship certain fungi have with root systems.

Agrispon suggests a number of points for comparison when considering the variety of biostimulants on the market.

It says a quart of one typical biostimulant on the market today retails for about \$US4 and covers 1,000 square feet.

Agrispon varies in price depending on location, but at the upper end costs around \$16 a pint.

One and a half ounces of Agrispon will treat 5,000 square feet, for about \$1.50, the company claims.

To cover the same area, the other product would take five quarts and cost \$20 - a difference of \$18.50. □