



## The way I see it...

BY PAUL KINDINGER

# Observations from an industry observer

**A**t one point in my career, when serving as director of agriculture for the state of Michigan, I was responsible for enforcing many regulatory programs. This often required me to report to the industries we regulated, the governor and the legislature. Many times, a delicate balancing act was required because keeping a level playing field was a major consideration.

There were times, of course, in which I had to make certain that regulations did not favor one party over another; that our enforcement policies were fair to all parties involved. It wasn't unusual, for instance, to be called upon by the legislature to explain how our programs operated in the field. Also, it wasn't uncommon to be called to a legislator's office when one of his/her constituents complained about our enforcement of a particular program. These discussions became very interesting, especially when the legislator was the chair of the state's appropriations committee. One thing is certain: all of these situations required me to do a lot of listening before forming an opinion or position.

My job today is similar in many respects. Much of what NAEDA and its affiliates do is work to keep the playing field as level as possible. We clearly represent you, the dealers, but do our absolute best to understand a manufacturer's perspective. I'm fortunate because I get to visit with dealers throughout North America and they share their issues, concerns and frustrations with me. At the same time, I also have the opportunity to visit with many top management officials at manufacturers of all sizes. This gives me a unique opportunity to make observations and form perspectives about the industry in which we work – and these observations are at the heart of this month's column.

### Following are some personal observations from this industry observer.

1. The overwhelming majority of people I meet, dealers and manufacturers, are hardworking, honest people trying to do the right thing.
2. There should be a heck of a lot more listening taking place because all parties have something valuable to add to the conversation. However, more often than not, people have their minds made up or their marching orders and are only interested in making their views known or making sure their position is the right one.
3. The customer needs to come first. Suggestions about what customers want and how to improve service to them often fall on deaf ears. If we ignore our customers, what is the point of being in business?

**Much of what NAEDA and its affiliates do is work to keep the playing field as level as possible.**

**We clearly represent you, the dealers, but do our absolute best to understand a manufacturer's perspective.**

4. There should be a much clearer understanding of the term "voluntary." *Webster's New World Dictionary* defines it in these terms: "brought about by one's own free choice... arising in the mind without external constraint... acting or done without compulsion or persuasion, profit, payment or any valuable consideration." Many times, dealers are faced with making decisions that are NOT voluntary.
5. It would be good to have a conversation between the parties before new fiscal year programs are introduced or new policies are unveiled.
6. Would we be more understanding of each other if we used something other than e-mail or legal correspondence as the major forms of communication?
7. It is a global market. This fact affects many decisions and should be more fully understood and appreciated.
8. Technology will continue to drive major changes in our industry. To paraphrase Charles Darwin, it's not always the fittest that survive but the most adaptable.
9. There are huge opportunities for collaboration on industry-wide issues. Workforce development is a perfect example. The issue is bigger than all of us combined.
10. TRUST is essential. The lack of trust drives up costs, wastes time and leads to less than optimal results. We genuinely need to work on finding ways to improve the TRUST between manufacturers and dealers.

You may agree or disagree with these observations – and you may have a few of your own – but that's the way I see it. ■

---

PAUL KINDINGER is president/CEO of the North American Equipment Dealers Association. The association provides educational, legal, legislative and financial services to approximately 5,000 retail agricultural, industrial and outdoor power equipment dealers in the United States and Canada.