

Celebrating a milestone ACRC collects 100 million pounds of plastic containers

By Chrissy Kadleck

In fitting fashion, the Ag Container Recycling Council celebrated its milestone collection of 100 million pounds of plastic containers by grinding up 15,000 high-density polyethylene containers at an event in Virginia last month.

The monumental and cumulative collection has been a work in progress since the nonprofit organization was founded in 1992.

Based in Washington, D.C., ACRC was established by the leading manufacturers of crop protection products to manage and promote the collection and recycling of triple-rinsed plastic agricultural containers.

The 25 member companies voluntarily fund collection of 8 million pounds of pesticide containers annually from 1,500 collection sites across 40 states.

Ron Perkins, ACRC executive director, said the organization had one of the first, if not *the* first, product stewardship programs in the country. The environmental impacts of the organization's achievements are impressive.

The recycling of 100 million pounds of containers has resulted in a savings of more than 500,000 cubic yards of landfill space, a reduction of 19,500 metric tons of carbon equivalent, and energy savings equal to 22.25 million gallons of gasoline, and it is equivalent to removing 15,475 passenger cars from the highway each year.

All nonrefillable HDPE plastic crop protection and specialty pesticide product containers are accepted in sizes up to and including 55 gallons. Containers are consolidated, chipped and safely recycled into a range of useful products approved by the ACRC, such as field drain tile and underground utility conduit.

"The major challenge that we have at this point is how do we get those users — the people who are emptying the contain-



MARKING A MILESTONE: Officials celebrate the Ag Container Recycling Council's 100 millionth pound of plastic containers collected since 1992. From left: Liza Fleeson, program manager for the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services; Nancy Fitz, chemical engineer for the U.S. EPA; Mike Johnson, county administrator for Southampton County, Va.; and Bill Spencer, manager of licensing and acquisitions for Arysta LifeScience of North America LLC.

er and presumably triple-rinsing it — getting them back to a collection site," said Perkins, who recently spent a week in Indianapolis with 55,000 people at a Future Farmers of America conference getting the word out to them and promoting the recycling of pesticide containers.

"This is a totally free program, so users triple-rinse the containers — which they have to do by law whether they recycle or not — and we'll come to collection sites and take the containers away to be recycled," he said.

Large growers and farms can even justify an individual pickup at their establishments, especially true in places like California, Perkins said.

Bill Spencer, manager of licensing and acquisitions with Arysta LifeScience NA LLC and executive board and external affairs chair for the ACRC, said the organization was founded to get control over the amount of plastic created by the industry. The goal was to keep HDPE containers out of the landfill and create a safe product out of the recycled plastic.

"We decided to say all plastic we collect

is going to go into uses that we feel are agricultural uses," said Spencer, who has been associated with the organization for its entire 17-year history.

He stressed that the ACRC is a voluntary program and member companies fund the organization's recycling efforts.

"Our industry gets a bad rap at times because of being a pesticide industry," he said. "We, as an industry, really care about what's going on around us and we know that driving down a road and seeing a farmer's back 40 with 300 plastic containers piled up behind is not necessarily a good stewardship for our industry." ■

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ACRC

Ag Container Recycling Council

www.acrecycle.org