

# All-natural fertilizer is a by-product of Iowa's ethanol plants

BY LE SPEARMAN

With the “green” product revolution in full swing – and products ranging from clothing and jewelry to flooring and home accessories filling store shelves – it’s easy to forget that thinking green really only hit mainstream America within the past several years. But that timing was perfect for an Iowa company that uses corn and soybean products – including by-products of the ethanol manufacturing process – to make all-natural fertilizer.

In fact, the 2002 Farm Bill, which included provisions encouraging the development of 100 percent bio-sourced products, provided just the impetus Delayne and Anne Johnson needed to create Four All Seasons, LLC. At the time, Delayne was general manager of a feed, grain and energy business.

“That gave us the incentive to develop our fertilizer, because about one-third of the fertilizer’s formula comes from by-products of the ethanol manufacturing process – and the other ingredients are all-natural products as well,” he says. “We were looking for a new and innovative product for those markets.”

## This is an Iowa product with international potential

The company opened its doors in January 2004. Its target markets are golf courses, athletic fields, sports complexes, park departments, schools, lawn-care services, municipalities, greenhouses and homeowners.

“We got into Four All Seasons because it was a niche market and a value-added endeavor for our local people,” says Anne, who oversees the company’s marketing, advertising and promotional events. “Keeping the environment friendly is huge to us, and we now have another product made in northwest Iowa. Four All Seasons is a product that helps all of us. It even helps the grain farmers who grow the corn and soybeans because they get more money for their crops.”

The Johnsons were careful to develop a product with low levels of phosphorous that will not pollute waterways, streams or lakes. The fertilizer is completely biodegradable, too, so its land-residue impact is zero – and children and pets can play on a freshly treated area with no worries about coming into contact with dangerous chemicals. Finally, there’s no manure in Four All Seasons fertilizer, so it has a clean smell.

Four All Seasons offers two varieties of fertilizer: Bio-Source 9:1:1 and Bio-Source 11:1:1. Each requires only two applications per growing season, compared to the three or four applications recommended for petroleum-based fertilizers. In addition, because Four All Seasons fertilizer is a slow-release product, it provides a steady, constant source of nutrients and nitrogen to vegetation while helping plants develop strong root systems.

## Product earns endorsements and recommendations

Four All Seasons fertilizer has been tested and documented by Iowa State University as safe to use on lawns, gardens and flowerbeds. Delayne, who has an agriculture business degree from ISU, originally contacted Dr. Nick Christians at the school about placing Four All Seasons fertilizer into the school’s annual turfgrass trials.

“Four All Seasons worked with researchers at ISU to test our fertilizer against competitors and documented its performance on test plots during 2004, 2005 and 2006,” says Delayne. “Dr. Christians did the research to show how we compare to other natural fertilizers. We received three years of credible laboratory data regarding our products.

“For our third year of test trials, we asked Dr. Christians to compare Four All Seasons to petroleum-based products. That’s why I can state that our product will last longer than petroleum-based products. The data showed that commercial nitrogen did not allow the plants to maintain the nitrogen as levelly and consistently as our product.”

Kevin Shawgo, parks and facilities superintendent for Ames, says the city used Four All Seasons fertilizer for its Adopt-A-Garden program for the first time last year.

“We went with the bio-based fertilizer because we use volunteers, and we didn’t want to give them exposure to a fertilizer that might have harmful effects,” he says. “Our flowers did the best they have done in 13 years, since we started the program. What we noticed was the plants were taller and they had more blooms on them. I think a lot of it had to do with the consistent release of the nitrogen; this fertilizer is slow-release and it is even. Our plants looked healthy all season.”

## A single application leads to a new future

Jack and Jane Hogue, owners of Prairie Pedlar gardens near Odebolt, used Four All Seasons on their lawns and flowerbeds for the first time last year – for a single midsummer application. Visitors noticed how well the landscape looked and began asking the Hogues what product they used.

Indeed, due to his great enthusiasm for the fertilizer, Jack recently became a sales representative for Four All Seasons.

“I have two ways to look at it – one as a farmer and one as a gardener,” he says. “It is easy to market and promote a product that I so strongly believe in. As a gardener, I know it is a great fertilizer for lawns, flowers and vegetables; for people and pets; and promising for the environment. As a farmer, it is a bonus because it is a bio-source product, and I am proud it is made from Iowa corn and soybean by-products. As parents and owners of public gardens where children daily run through the grass and between our flower beds, we try to be as natural as we can, and this product is perfect.”



Photo: Le Spearman

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Anne and Delayne Johnson, owners of Four All Seasons, LLC, live near Galva and are members of Iowa Lakes Electric Cooperative.

Four All Seasons fertilizer is made in Iowa from corn and soybean products, including the by-products of the ethanol manufacturing process.



The city of Ames Parks and Recreation Department uses Four All Seasons fertilizer for its Adopt-a-Flower garden program.

Four All Seasons fertilizer outperformed its organic and petroleum-based competitors during turfgrass trials conducted by Iowa State University.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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