

Nufarm cheque heralds launch of national plastics recovery programme

Nufarm, manufacturers of crop protection products such as Roundup[®], led the way by becoming the first participant in the Agrecovery scheme to hand their levy cheque to the environmental organisation. The handover took place on 1 April, the official launch date of the Agrecovery programme.

Agrecovery is a product stewardship programme for the sustainable recovery of triple rinsed agriculture and forestry sector plastic containers. Farm plastic is a persistent and growing problem for farmers and growers throughout New Zealand. An estimated 5 to 10 million plastic containers are used annually for agriculture, dairy and animal health products. Agrecovery will enable farmers and growers to dispose of these plastic chemical containers in a responsible way, provided they are the products of manufacturers, like Nufarm, who support the programme.

The Agrecovery Programme is self-sustaining and provides a long-term recovery solution for agriculture and forestry sector plastic containers. It is governed by a not-for-profit charitable trust under joint auspices of a number of industry bodies. The programme is managed by Hawke's Bay based 3R Group Ltd.

Specially marked shipping containers have been installed at 22 waste recovery sites throughout the country, with on-site staff trained to inspect and receive clean agrochemical containers from 1 to 60 litres in size. A further 30 sites is to be opened in the coming months, the target being to have a collection site within 50km of any major agricultural area. Details of where the collections sites are and when they are open can be found at www.agrecovery.co.nz

Agrecovery shreds and bales the collected containers, before sending them to a New Zealand commercial plastics recycler for reprocessing.

“This is something we've talked about in the industry for 20 years,” says Patrick Clement, NZ Country Manager for Nufarm. “It is very gratifying to finally see it happening. Agrecovery allows us to extend our product stewardship right to the end of the lifecycle of its last remaining component.”

As former president of the New Zealand Association for Animal Health and Crop Protection, Agcarm, Clement has been intensely involved with the proposed scheme since a practical way of running the programme was first suggested two years ago. Agcarm is one of the trustees of the programme, along with Federated Farmers, Horticulture New Zealand, Environment Waikato (for local government) and Fonterra.

“This scheme would never have gotten off the ground without the support of leading industry players such as Nufarm,” says Bruce Emerson, director of 3R Group, who accepted Nufarm’s cheque on behalf of Agrecovery.

The programme is funded through a cents per litre levy collected by all participating manufacturers – currently over 80% of the industry – on their eligible products.

“From an end user’s perspective, this programme relieves them of the need for costly or banned disposal methods such as burning or burying, while helping them achieve higher sustainability standards,” says Nufarm’s Patrick Clement.

“We believe the costs involved are more than worth it from an environmental responsibility perspective.” He points out that the programme is not intended to build up any funds. The levy will be adjusted annually to only cover the costs of running the programme.

“As the industry-wide levy is charged on a volume and weight basis, users can save by buying more concentrated product or by buying in larger, refillable containers which do not attract the levy.”

Manufacturers who are not yet part of Agrecovery will not be able to have their containers recovered through Agrecovery. An identifying Agrecovery sticker will be applied to eligible containers as new products come into the market.

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