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## BASF goes biological

CHEMICAL

With the acquisition of Becker Underwood, BASF will bring on new technologies that complement its robust R&D background.

CHUCK BOWEN | September 21, 2012



In a billion-dollar deal [announced yesterday](#), BASF plans to acquire horticulture technology company Becker Underwood.

With the purchase, which is expected to close by the end of the year, the German manufacturer will gain access to a wide range of coatings and biological technology to complement its already strong foundation of insecticides, herbicides and fungicides.

The deal continues BASF's move from a focus purely on plant protection to one on [plant health](#). The company launched its Intrinsic line in the [golf market in 2010](#), and has been slowly expanding it since. The product group, which includes an EPA-approved plant health label, has been shown to improve disease control, response to heat and mechanical stress and growth efficiency in plants.

Becker Underwood will be integrated into a new functional crop care unit that will operate within BASF's crop protection division, the company says. The group will spend its time developing new plant health, nutrient management and water management products.

"This new unit will really address the innovation side, the development side of new products. That's really the major change within the organization," says Nevin McDougall, senior vice president of BASF's Crop Protection Group in North America.

We caught up with McDougall to learn more about what this acquisition means for the company and the green industry at large.

*Lawn & Landscape: What motivated this purchase?*

Nevin McDougall: I think the top line of the story here is addressing the changing needs of our customers and broadening our portfolio to have broader range of solutions to address the changing needs of the marketplace. Whether that's the row crop market, the turf industry, landscaping, ornamentals – clearly our customers have a lot of changing needs. Not only traditional pest management, but also nitrogen management, water management. We felt the acquisition of Becker Underwood made a very nice complement for our existing activities.

*L&L: Was there any specific technology that Becker Underwood had that you wanted? When I think of Becker Underwood, I think of seed treatment....*

NM: Exactly. Where the fit from our perspective is, clearly we've got a very strong R&D and portfolio around traditional crop protection: fungicides, insecticides, herbicides. And Becker Underwood really offers some new technologies for us to strengthen ourselves in – biological, seed treatments, seed coatings. It acts as a very complementary acquisition and will broaden our technology base and R&D capabilities.

*L&L: What new technology will likely make its way into the professional markets first?*

NM: That's a little hard to say at this point. We won't be closing the deal until the end of calendar year. Through the due diligence process we've got some initial ideas on new projects and synergies from a technology standpoint. But it's a little premature to state exactly what those will be and timelines.

*L&L: BASF and many other manufacturers are moving away from a focus on plant nutrition to a focus on plant health. Can you tell me why you're taking this plant health positioning, and what that means for you guys in the market?*

NM: From past years of experience we've had in plant health, we see a growing opportunity to provide additional productivity or efficiency for our customers through products that provide more than traditional disease or insect control. With the acquisition of Becker Underwood, that allows us to tap into other technologies such as biologicals that may have other plant health effects that we can then commercialize and bring to a global market. We see that plant health as a fundamental growth driver in the future. We've been fortunate to have invested in that area, and are leading in that area, and this acquisition further strengthens that growth opportunity.

*L&L: Any other acquisitions on the horizon that we should know about?*

NM: We are always on the lookout for a good acquisition. So we are always looking at potential companies or technologies that would make a good fit for our portfolio.

*L&L: Are we likely to see a move toward adjuvants being co-packaged with fungicides?*

NM: That's hard to say. It's really dependent on the formulation tech, the active ingredient and the stability of the formulation development. In some cases that is happening, in other cases it's not, so I can't say it's a general trend by any means.

*L&L: Anything else we haven't covered that you'd like to share with our readers?*

NM: We're really excited about the opportunity Becker Underwood promises our customers and are looking at how we can really get more synergies out of our respective technology bases and innovation platforms. In the long run, this should be viewed as very positive for your readers, and knowing that there's a long-term commitment to R&D and bringing more and better solutions to the market.

The author is editor and associate publisher of *Lawn & Landscape* magazine.

### Stress protection

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