



MEMORANDUM

TO: Sarah Hull
FROM: David Bartlett
SUBJECT: Strategic Communications – Paraquat
DATE: March 15, 2010

VIA EMAIL

PRIVILEGED AND CONFIDENTIAL

Following up on our earlier conversations, here for your consideration is a brief summary of the discussions last week in Basel and a few additional points to consider as you take a fresh look at familiar questions and evaluate your future communications plans for paraquat.

Background

While we discussed several strategic communications challenges currently confronting paraquat, we focused primarily on the emerging threat of a possible link between the product and Parkinson's disease. While the longstanding issue of suicide remains an acute problem in parts of the developing world, the Parkinson's link could at any moment spark a popular movement against paraquat in the increasingly important North American market.

That said, we did discuss the need to perhaps take another look at messaging around the suicide issue, specifically with respect to the basic message that the product is safe when used appropriately. Unfortunately, while perfectly logical, messages like this run the risk of being perceived as blaming the victim and thereby suggesting that Syngenta is somehow dismissive of their suffering.

Of most immediate concern is the prospect of new studies being published based on data from the ongoing NIH Agricultural Health Study. New findings based on this massive epidemiological study cannot be easily dismissed and certainly will not be ignored by activist critics looking for leverage in the public debate, or by the media looking for a new story. This is especially true

given the growing concern about Parkinson's disease among the aging "baby boomer" population. The incidence of Parkinson's disease in this vocal and influential group is certain to increase in coming years, prompting demands for an explanation and the search for a villain to blame.

In addition, new studies based on other research might also emerge at any time and offer either communications challenges that would have to be addressed or positive opportunities that could possibly be leveraged. Of particular concern, of course, would be any study purporting to establish a causal link between paraquat exposure and Parkinson's rather than just another epidemiological correlation.

As part of our discussion, we considered several possible scenarios. For example, a study that suggests that no such link exists, or that undermines previous findings suggesting that one does, would offer an opportunity, not to criticize our critics, but instead to emphasize the message of safety and benefit rather than danger and risk.

A new study that adds to the evidence suggesting a correlation between paraquat and Parkinson's, but failing to establish a definitive link, would present both a challenge and an opportunity. Critics would undoubtedly attempt to frame the findings in the light most helpful to them, emphasizing potential danger and risk. But rather than react to that message defensively, we would be better advised to ignore it and instead frame the findings on our terms, emphasizing safety and benefit.

Any study that shows a definitive causal relationship between paraquat and Parkinson's would, of course, require a response that reflects concern, commitment, and action, ideally a call for more and better research. In the worst case scenario, such a finding would demand a withdrawal of the product from the market and a corresponding shift of the overall communications strategy to one focused primarily on mitigation of legal liability and protection of corporate reputation.

Strategic Objective

During last week's discussions we first addressed the question of strategic objective. What are we trying to accomplish, and how can a communications effort help us do it? What is our definition of success? What is our desired outcome? The consensus seemed to be that our overall strategic objective is simply to keep the product registered and on the market.

Under the circumstances, it is probably unrealistic to expect a clear victory over critics of herbicides in general and paraquat in particular. A more realistic approach would probably be to neutralize the other side's arguments in order to fully leverage the natural advantages paraquat already enjoys in the debate. While they are certainly aware of the potential risks inherent in the use of paraquat, or any other herbicide for that matter, farmers still like the product because it is cost effective and it works.

Farmers don't want to think that a product that has been so useful to them for so long might be dangerous to their health, and they are looking to us to reassure them that this is not the case.

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Consumers, while they can certainly be frightened by activist campaigns against herbicides, are likewise looking for credible reassurance that they are not at risk and that they won't have to do anything drastic to protect their health.

We also discussed the broader issue of risk perception and risk communication. The most important consideration in this regard is that risk is really all about perception, especially the emotional perception of benefit and control. Human nature is such that any of us is most often inclined to perceive risk on the basis of factors other than scientific fact. For example, if we find something useful or beneficial, we naturally perceive it to be less risky. Similarly, if we feel we are in control of a situation, no matter how potentially dangerous, we naturally perceive it to be less risky, notwithstanding the hard facts. To the extent that our messaging about paraquat takes into account this fundamental aspect of human nature, it will be more effective at minimizing the perception of risk and enhancing the perception of benefit.

Target Audiences

We next discussed audience identification and segmentation. With whom do we need to communicate and why? What are their concerns? What are their expectations? What questions would they ask if they had the opportunity? Trying to anticipate every possible question that might be asked by every possible audience is usually a waste of time and resources. But it is very useful to think about the emotional concerns of target audiences in terms of the broad categories of questions likely to be on their minds. And it is critical to understand that these questions and concerns are frequently irrational, based on raw emotion rather than verifiable fact. Moreover, these emotional concerns are all too often predicated on a false premise or a hypothetical "what if" question.

The list of potential target audiences for our messages about paraquat is long, and the concerns of each are often very different, even contradictory. For example, we discussed how the concerns of corporate factory farm owners are likely to differ sharply from those of small family farm operations. We discussed the interests of farmers compared with those of distributors and the difference between the emotional concerns of older and younger farmers. We discussed the audience of regulators and how they are the audience most likely to respond to messages firmly based on scientific fact, even as they sometimes find themselves pressured by politicians who are naturally more responsive to emotional public opinion. Other target audiences we discussed included food processors and retailers, activist groups, the environmental and development lobbies, activist NGOs, researchers, Parkinson's sufferers, and, of course, the public at large.

As part of our examination of target audiences we considered the natural spread of public opinion on any issue across a familiar bell curve. At the extreme left and right of the opinion spectrum are the groups and individuals who for one reason or another either already embrace our position or will never be convinced to do so. Taken together, however, these two groups represent only a small minority of the potential audience. Most people, most of the time, don't care very much about any issue and are therefore open to considering reasonable arguments that are presented in a way that they can understand and with which they feel comfortable. And most

people tend to embrace the first such argument they encounter. Defining the terms and framing the debate first is therefore very important in shaping public perception.

Effective Messages

From a strategic point of view, the most effective messages are always positive and forward looking, never defensive or exclusively reactive. Indeed, the most solidly based and aggressively delivered defense is often ineffective, if only because it can easily send the unintended message that perhaps you have something to be defensive about. Unfortunately, for most audiences the weight of scientific evidence, however convincing to well-informed scientists, rarely tips the scale of overall public opinion. The more extensive the scientific evidence, the less likely the audience is to pay attention.

Because the potential audiences for messages about paraquat are so numerous and vary so widely in their concerns, finding messages that resonate globally is particularly challenging. But it is clear that reactive messaging alone will not work. Reacting to the other side's messages only allows the critics to set the agenda and frame the debate solely on their terms. In order shift the conversation from what is "not bad" to what is "good," it will be necessary to establish a parallel path of positive messaging that is both factual and responsive to the emotional concerns of the audiences we need to reach.

With respect to facts and supporting evidence, less is usually more. A few key facts to which the target audience can comfortably relate and which they can easily remember will be far more effective than a huge mass of complex scientific evidence that they will have difficulty processing. To be effective, messages must not only be true, they must also "ring true" to the target audience.

In this regard, images are always more powerful than words, and stories are always more powerful than abstract concepts. Wherever possible, we should try to find and leverage personal stories, illustrated with powerful visual images, to support our positive messages. One picture of a woman bent over weeding a field will be far more effective at supporting our messages than a mountain of scientific data.

We also discussed the difficulties inherent in making the most powerful positive messages about paraquat understandable to the audiences we need to reach most. For example, concepts such as sustainable agriculture and no-till farming may be very meaningful for those in the know, but difficult for a broader audience to understand and appreciate. While there are probably things we could do to make these messages more effective for a broader audience, a better approach might be to emphasize more aggressively the more easily understood concept of food security and the importance of herbicides like paraquat in the fight to feed a rapidly growing population from a fixed or shrinking inventory of arable land.

Tactical Opportunities

In addition to discussing the importance of framing messages in terms of safety and benefits rather than dangers and risks, we considered the importance of reaching out to key target audiences where they are already going to find information. As discussed in more detail in our *Online Landscape Analysis* (attached), Syngenta already has a significant presence on the Web that can be further leveraged in a number of important ways to both deliver the positive paraquat message and respond to organized online attacks from critics.

During our meetings in Basel we discussed several specific online opportunities, including site architecture and content, search engine optimization (SEO), and online listening and engagement. Specifically, we recommended that the architecture and organization of the website be adjusted so that critical information is easier to find. In order to make the site's organic SEO effort more effective, we recommend that a far greater quantity of fresh content be added to the site far more frequently. In order to further leverage the paid SEO effort already underway, we recommended that it be refined and expanded to control negative as well as positive search terms. In order to stay in touch with the online conversation, where any activist movement built around a purported connection between paraquat exposure and Parkinson's disease is likely to erupt, we recommended an active online listening campaign and an organized engagement effort using both internal and external resources and taking advantage of not only blogs, but social networking platforms as well.

Recognizing the need to develop a corporate rapid response reflex and the potential effectiveness of external third party champions in the debate over paraquat safety, we recommended that a significant effort be made to identify and develop credible third party experts willing to serve as a sort of "truth squad" to quickly counter false or incomplete information, online and elsewhere, while being careful not to play into the other side's hand by overreacting to every new scare story that might appear. When delivering a message through the media it is usually a lot more effective to point reporters to third parties to rebut your critics or deliver your messages than to deliver them yourself.

Finally, we discussed what might be done on a larger scale to change the overall framework of the debate. One idea that was discussed involved generating fresh positive news by pushing beyond the seemingly endless debate over a possible correlation between paraquat exposure and Parkinson's and funding new research into the actual cause of the disease. A dramatic move like this would give us a powerful positive story to tell and instantly put the burden of proof back on our critics, forcing them to explain why it would be acceptable to rely on suggestions about correlation when common sense suggests that establishing causation is the ultimate logical goal.

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