

Beware of Snake Oils

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Growers are bombarded these days with numerous micronutrient fertilizers, supplements, biostimulants, soil enhancing products, and technologies reported to improve the health of the soil, the crop, or irrigation water and/or reduce pest pressures. Many of these products can sound like they are grounded in scientific facts until you look critically at the research or lack thereof. It is probably safe to estimate that at least half of the non-pesticide, non-fertilizer products on the market are completely ineffective and have no hope of improving your yields. Many of the rest of the products may provide some benefits but lack the rigorous research results that would allow growers to make informed decisions on whether they will improve their bottom line over cheaper alternatives. Here are some considerations for avoiding the scams and maximizing your profit potential.

Focus on the Basics

You can attain the vast majority of your yield potential by focusing on 5 main things in lavender:

1. Ensure the soil pH is in the optimal range at planting. This is not usually a problem but could be in some soils.
2. Ensure adequate fertilization with nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P) and potassium (K). P and K should be adjusted based on soil tests at planting and N applied every year. N, P and K should come from either synthetic fertilizers or from composts or manures rather than much more expensive special formulations.
3. Ensure adequate water availability during dry periods while avoiding excessively wet conditions (and heavy soils), especially over winter.
4. Ensure you choose winter-hardy cultivars and use row covers for winter protection.
5. Manage pests when needed.

Snake Oils vs Fertilizers

Many snake oils offer some benefits because of the macro or micronutrients they contain. However, in most cases it is far more economical to apply the same nutrients as a soil-applied fertilizer rather than a specially formulated, secret recipe foliar spray that has to be applied weekly all year (for example).

Irrigation

Plants just need water and most water sources in Ontario are already suitable for crops (i.e., low salinity, low sulfur, etc.). There is no need to electrify, magnetize or add anything to the irrigation water (e.g., surfactants) to make it more available to the plants.

Fertilizers vs Pesticides

If you are trying to control pests, stick with registered pest control products that are proven to work. Biostimulants and supplements may offer minor benefits but if they advertise pest control and are not registered as a pesticide then they are illegal to apply.

In the end, consider who is promoting the benefits of the product. Will they benefit financially from you purchasing this product or are they providing independent advice. If they will benefit financially then they should be able to provide compelling evidence from third-party research that it both works AND the benefit of the product is worth the additional cost over the industry standards.