



## Supermarket News: Eco-Friendly Lawn Care

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### Expect eco-friendly lawn care products to be in full bloom this spring.

THE NATURAL AND ORGANIC LAWN CARE sector has been growing like a weed.

Supermarkets like [Meijer](#) and [Wal-Mart](#) now stock eco-friendly varieties of fertilizer, weed killer and potting soil alongside conventional choices. Mainstream manufacturers like Scott's have gotten in on the act with organic lines and concentrated formulas in smaller packaging. All in all, an estimated 12 million households use only natural and organic lawn and garden products, according to the National Gardening Association, up from 5 million in 2004.



“This all began with food, and it's trickled down into the lawn and garden sector,” said Paul Tukey, founder of [safelawns.org](#) and author of “The Organic Lawn Care Manual.” “These same people who are buying organic food for their kids are saying, ‘Wait a minute, I don't want toxic pesticides on my lawns and around my children.’”

Tukey estimates the organic gardening and lawn care sector comprises 15% of the \$57.7 billion total market. There's been exponential growth over the past several years, and the recession appears to have only increased demand as many consumers turned to the simple pleasures of tending their lawns and growing their own food. **A recent study from the NGA shows consumers spent 14% more time on lawn care last year than the year before.**

“While the amount consumers spent on their lawns and gardens was down a little, it did not approach the level of decline seen in their discretionary spending,” said Bruce Butterfield, research director with the association.

This demand has inspired manufacturers to develop creative new offerings. **Kreider Farms, a dairy and egg supplier based in Manheim, Pa., recently began recycling its cow and chicken manure into an all-natural fertilizer. Last year, the company sold 40-pound bags of the mixture exclusively to grocery stores that already stocked its milk, eggs and other products.**

**According to sales and marketing manager Dave Andrews, all the stores have reordered for this spring, and Kreider is looking to expand to additional retailers.**

**“Customers can enjoy our milk and other products, and know that by buying a bag of our fertilizer they’re helping the same company recycle the waste those processes produce,” he said.**

**David Darrenkamp, co-owner of Darrenkamp's, which operates three stores around Lancaster County, Pa., said he agreed to stock the Kreider Farms fertilizer because it was a brand his customers knew, and because the mixture didn't give off any harsh odors.**

**“I know people who will go to a local farm to get horse and cow manure to put around their gardens and lawns, and that's a mess” said Darrenkamp. “This product has the same qualities, and it was easier to work with.”**

Retailers can expect to see demand for such products increase even further as fuel prices go up, said Tukey.

“Synthetic fertilizers and pesticides are all derived from petroleum, so when fuel gets above \$3 a gallon the manufacturing costs skyrocket, and that brings the price tag of organic very much in line with conventional,” he explained.

Legislative forces are also at play, as states have begun taking a hard look at chemical treatments around schools and other sensitive areas. Last year, New York's legislature passed the Child Safe Playing Field Act, which will ban pesticide treatments from school grounds beginning in 2012. Similar measures have also passed in Massachusetts and Connecticut, and even more states have begun regulating the application of pesticides and herbicides around environmentally-protected watersheds.

There's a tremendous momentum behind natural lawn and garden products but, according to Tukey, harnessing it requires more than just putting products on shelves. Organic lawn care solutions work differently from conventional in that they treat the soil rather than the grass directly. Results may not come as fast as consumers would like, and it's important that retailers relay that message with the help of knowledgeable employees.

“Retail stores need to invest in training for their staff first so that they know what they're talking about with these natural alternatives,” said Tukey. “The No. 1 reason customers go to the family-owned lawn and garden stores is not because they're beating them on price, but because they're beating them on education and knowledge.”

To this end, retailers have actually featured Tukey at in-store and employee education events. [Whole Foods Market](#) brought the former HGTV host into stores as part of a “Meet the Grower” event, and The Home Depot recently featured him in a training video that it played for its workers.

**At Darrenkamp's, meanwhile, customers can find a standard selection of items like potting soil and mulch. With the Kreider Farms fertilizer, health regulations required the bags be merchandised outside the stores. That turned out to be a positive for sales, however, since shoppers saw them stacked up beside the front door as they walked inside.**

**“The local news station even came out and did a story on it, so that definitely got people's attention,” said Darrenkamp.**