



Hyer Standard for the Farmer-Turned-Investigator

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Editors note: This is another story in our series of employee profiles. A jpg photo of Dave Hyer is attached.

MADISON – "Dave is our farmer-turned-investigator," says a supervisor by way of explaining what's special about Dave Hyer, a 25-year veteran with the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection.

Formally, Hyer is an environmental enforcement specialist senior. He inspects businesses, investigates complaints and potential violations, and enforces state and federal regulations governing pesticides, animal feeds, and fertilizers.

On his first day of work, back in 1988, he watched a convoy of semi-trailers pull into his driveway as he was pulling out. They were there to take his herd to their new owner, a farmer who was expanding his operation.

"I was a fifth-generation dairy farmer in Sauk County, near Prairie du Sac. I farmed in partnership with my parents for 16 years. We milked about 50 cows and did some cash-cropping of corn and hay," Hyer says. "I guess finally the alfalfa looked greener on the other side of the fence, so I left farming behind, but that experience has been invaluable in helping me relate to the challenges of people I work with now."

Hyer's territory covers all of Clark, Wood, Portage, and Waupaca counties, and a small part of Marathon County.

"The single group that I spend most of my time working with is probably the commercial agribusiness community, such as feed mills, fertilizer plants, pesticide dealers and applicators. I also work directly with farmers. I don't have large urban areas in my region, so agriculture seems to take most of my time," he says. "I sometimes work with DNR wardens when something overlaps both DATCP and DNR responsibility, such as responding to a fertilizer or pesticide spill."

Another long-time co-worker notes that Hyer has great credibility with those he regulates because of the way he approaches his work. Recently, investigating a complaint against an aerial application operation, he learned that all the farmer's neighbor really wanted was advance notification when the planes would be spraying. He got the two sides to talk directly, made life easier for everyone, and avoided costs to taxpayers for what could have been a long process.

A newer employee whom Hyer mentored says, "I believe Dave's greatest assets are his strong knowledge of all the different programs, his calm demeanor and good sense of humor. The folks at Dave's facilities respect and trust him. They definitely rely on him as a resource for 'the latest and greatest' from DATCP. I'm lucky to be able to work with him and learn from him."

"My favorite part of the job is being a resource to business people who need to understand complex regulations in the most practical way possible. I find most people want to do the right thing; they just need someone to provide guidance or share ideas about how to adapt their methods to be in compliance. I'm pleased when I earn their trust and they begin to understand that I really do want them to succeed," he says.



Dave Hyer is a farmer-turned-investigator.

Staying on top of those same complex regulations is one of Hyer's biggest challenges: "As an example, soil fumigant pesticide labeling that was seven pages long only three years ago is now 70 pages long. You can't be a resource if you don't have a good understanding yourself. "

A typical day entails traveling to a site to conduct an inspection, interviewing staff, sampling, photographing – documenting what he finds. "Depending on many factors, some days I'm more in enforcement mode and other days, I'm more of a trainer," he says.

His memories include some humor, too –at least in retrospect. He recalls his job interview, at the shabby old building that used to house DATCP, and it had shabby old furniture. "I was wearing the only suit I owned, and carrying an empty briefcase. When I stood up to enter the interview room, a spring protruding from the chair hooked me in the posterior and tore a big hole in my slacks." And his first office was in space shared with employees from other state agencies, including probation and parole officers. "When it was necessary to arrest someone during a parole office visit, I would let the police in the back door. I received a plastic junior parole officer badge for my service."

Hyer attended the University of Wisconsin-Madison Farm and Industry Short Course. He and his wife, Kathy, have five children and 14 grandchildren.

When he's not keeping up with regulations or getting called out on weekends, he enjoys time with his family, hunting, and doing therapy dog activities.

"Sometimes I miss farming, but Kathy reminds me of the vacations that never happened, or the school program that I couldn't attend because a heifer was going into labor, so I'm pleased with the changes I've made," he says.

Most of the folks he regulates would probably agree.

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