

The Plaid Person

This is a story about failure. And Plaid Man.

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At a recent field day (on hemp production, which may or may not explain everything), we had a person who went by the code name Plaid Man. I think everyone at some point in life has dealt with a Plaid Person. No, we aren't talking lumberjacks and Monty Python skits, but something far more annoying: The person who talks over you at a seminar, field day, class, or lecture; who fails to listen to what anyone has to say; and who is insistent that they know everything and are incredibly opinionated and aggressive about it. And, of course, they will not stop talking. Or, more correctly stated, they simply won't shut up.

The field day had six stations, and by the middle of the first rotation, I was already being told (since I was the field day organizer) that I needed to do something about Plaid Man. At this point, I had already failed a former student and fellow APS member **Hans Schmitz**, along with our specialty crops production manager, who had been subjected to Plaid Man for a good 20 minutes. And Plaid Man was just getting warmed up. He was determined to share his knowledge and expertise about industrial hemp, without ever having grown any. It would have been funny was it not for one thing: He was talking and the speakers weren't.

Then he came to the pest management rotation. I was ready. As a plant pathologist, I was prepared to be his Alamo (pun intended).

There was nothing. Not a peep. One meek question, which I answered, and he didn't follow up and contradict. It was so...weird.

I was so confused. He had already harassed three speakers. He then went on to harass every other speaker at the field day. It was only then, when he was at the station that went over the legal status of industrial hemp in Indiana, that I realized that I *Cercospor*'d him. (Verb. Past Participle. Verfication derived from *Cercospora*, meaning I accidentally used a big word to intimidate someone.) Yes. You read that correctly. I also *Phom*'d and *Pythium*'d him, along with *Fusarium*'d. I *Rhizock*'d his world. I suspect the weed scientist gave him Liberty...and a dose of Round-Up. Or whatever those weed scientists do. He was suddenly quiet—at least for 30 minutes.

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It seemed like a small victory at the time, but really, it probably speaks to a larger problem, not of conflict resolution (which this is a great example for the failure of) but of scientific illiteracy. The farmers in my audience knew what I was talking about, but the hipster dude from another state had no clue. He thought he knew everything there was about industrial hemp production, except pest management, apparently.

As for Plaid Man, we should have pulled him aside, asked him to allow other participants the chance to speak, and failing that, asked him to leave. There's always next year to get it right. As for leadership, it seems we need to provide more generalized information about plant pathology so people like Plaid Man can be Plaid Man...Even at the plant pathology station. So he can't be *Cercospor*'d even if we desperately wish we could do so. ■