

▼ BASHING THE HAND THAT FEEDS?

As a writer with a strong interest in rational, safe pest control, I've been subscribing to PCT for a number of years. I find it interesting, full of good information, well edited and very handsome. While not always agreeing with the points of view expressed, I have great respect for your industry members.

However, over the years I've noticed a jarring fondness for government bashing inappropriate for an industry that doesn't hesitate to cry for help from government when it hits a bump or two in the road.

In your September 1996 issue, I read that the celebrated government basher Patrick Buchanan will trumpet his message to your members in San Diego, while a few pages further on I see that the city of New Orleans is coming hat in hand to the national treasury (sustained by contributions from all Americans) for \$100 million to help fight the Formosan termite, which is destroying the city's historic French Quarter. Evidently, private PCOs can't handle the problem alone.

Your government-hating members don't seem to hesitate to avail themselves of the vast amount of free (read "paid for by all American citizens") entomological research supported by federal and state governments, uncovering new, imaginative, and, let us hope, profitable ways of controlling urban pests.

Aren't your members a bit like teenagers, living under the parental roof, eating the parental food, wearing clothes bought with their parents' credit cards, and grousing with their friends about the raw deal they have because they're expected to keep their rooms clean, obey a 10 p.m. curfew, play their boomboxes at a considerably low level, and generally help keep harmony in the family?

It seems to me that there are two hands feeding you - the chemical manufacturers' and the government's. Why lick one while biting the other?

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Editor's Note: Lifton is the author of *Bug Busters: Poison-Free Pest Controls for Your House & Garden*.

Readers with comments are invited to write: PCT Letters, 4012 Bridge Ave., Cleveland OH 44113. Letters can also be faxed to 216/961-0364. The PCT editors reserve the right to edit letters for reasons of length or clarity.

Reader Feedback

POINT/COUNTERPOINT

Editor's note: Several PCT readers responded to a letter written by Bernice Lifton which was critical of the "government bashing" of some industry members who "don't seem to hesitate to avail themselves of the vast amount of free entomological research supported by federal and state governments." Excerpts from two letters appear in this month's issue of the magazine.

To begin my rebuttal to Bernice Lifton's letter (Dec. 1996), very little national and state research money goes to urban entomology, the segment which encompasses most pest control operators. Urban entomologists depend on pest control operators and related industries for a significant portion of their funding. For example, the endowed chair at Texas A&M University for urban entomology

was funded by donations from pest control operators all over the United States. One purpose of this chair is to provide an independent evaluation of pesticides and their effectiveness.

Research dollars in urban entomology also come from the "horrible" chemical manufacturers. They require independent research of their products to determine their effectiveness. This process is very complicated. Since Ms. Lifton probably only recommends "safe and natural products" that do not need these evaluations, I guess these words will fall on deaf ears.

Eighty percent of all companies are small mom-and-pop operations. The government really does not give us much. What we depend on is something Ms. Lifton might not understand; it's called the free market system. If we do things right, we get to stay in business. If we don't do things right, we have to work for someone else, or perhaps go on disability so Ms. Lifton can support us. The government doesn't support us with money, but it is burdening the little guy with many regulations and paperwork. Prices must be competitive, yet complying with regulations produces higher prices. Our profit margin decreases and it becomes difficult to stay in business. If we had sheep or farmland we might get subsidized by the government, but we don't. We are the silent majority. We don't want handouts. We want to be left alone. We don't have our hands out for government money!

While PCOs aren't grabbing money by the fistfuls from the government, it seems that those Ms. Lifton sympathizes with are. The government has embraced individuals suffering from multiple chemical sensitivity (MCS). On the January 3, 1997, edition of the TV news magazine *20/20*, John Stossel described a California program for individuals who suffer from MCS. It cost taxpayers \$1.8 million to build an "ecology house" where MCS sufferers, with a note from their doctor, could live for \$115 per month. Is our tax money well spent on an ecology house or other MCS project? No! It could have been used for fire ant research, new termiticide research, or Hantavirus or Lyme disease research.

Ms. Lifton, ask any of those involved in urban pest control research if they need funding and they will all say, "yes." Texas A&M University, even with an endowed chair in urban entomology, needs help funding research for graduate students. I, for one, support eliminating the spending of tax money on frivolous projects. If you worked as hard as I do in pest control, and saw what little profit remains at the end of the year, you would too.

I feel Bernice Lifton owes the PCOs of America an apology for her ignorance. I am not a free-loader. I do not ask for handouts from my government. At the end of the day, I am tired and my back end is dirty from looking behind racks in commercial kitchens, my knees are soaked from the urine I didn't see at that nursing home, and my bump cap has cobwebs on it from maneuvering under that crawl space or climbing in that attic. The last thing I want to read is a person holding my industry in contempt. What I prefer to remember is my customer's relief when I solved that difficult roach infestation or found that dead rodent in their home, and they say, "Do you know, you are my hero?"

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