



# NOT JUST A PRETTY BAG

Don't be swayed by clever marketing ploys. Trust a food plot seed company that has produced proven results for decades.

■ by *Matt Harper*

If you've read this before, pretend it's the first time: It's often said the world is run by lawyers. But I think marketers might have equal if not more influence on the world today.

Why discuss marketing in a hunting magazine (as I'm sure my editor is wondering)? As hunters, we're extremely susceptible to marketing trickery and shenanigans. However, you must look beyond packaging, claims and endorsements to find out if food plot products can back up their hype. (Spoiler alert: Whitetail Institute products have been proven to do that.) But first, let's dig into the food plot marketing world.

## MARKETING STRATEGY

Marketers do more than create catchy slogans and tantalizing advertisements. They dig deep into the collective psyche of people, mining for primary factors that influence decision making, and then manipulate those triggers to make you want to buy a product.

I know this because I've managed marketing teams for many years. And I've found that although marketing has become more complicated, it's also easier in some ways. There are so many platforms today — print, TV, social media and others — that you can bombard your target audience daily and wear them down. But marketing doesn't have to be 100 percent fact. It can be 1 percent truth and 99 percent BS, because no one really regulates it. I used to think you couldn't make outright false claims, but I'm not sure anymore.

For example, my wife likes various types of tea, coffee and juices. Recently, I read an eye-catching label on one brand of tea. In the ingredients section, along with some herbs I'm not so sure weren't made

up, it said "LOVE" in all caps. It didn't say that on a random part of the label but in the actual ingredient section. I guess it passes scrutiny because it's cute and makes people feel warm and good about what they're drinking. The logical left brain knows love is not a physical ingredient, but the right brain says, "Oh well, it makes me happy."

The more primal the subject, the deeper marketers can cut to elicit a response. Sex, food and family are primal components and can be easily touched to prompt a stronger response. Hunting is also primal. At its root, it's a source of survival; a means by which we obtain subsistence. Additionally, hunting involves another core element: ego. You might say you don't hunt for the prestige of bagging a trophy buck. But even bringing home meat for the family can produce a gratification that boosts ego. After all, the hunters who always brought home meat for the village were held in the highest regard.

But most of us are also looking for a big, mature buck. Even if you're not splashing it across social media or filming it, pride is often present. You might not tell anyone about a huge buck you shot, but you'll probably reflect proudly about how you matched wits and skill against a whitetail's superior senses and wariness and won. And there's nothing wrong with that. I just wanted to present the rules of the hunting marketing game.

## THE EYE

Humans are predators, regardless of what Disney wants you to believe. Some might say we can eat vegetation, but so can bears. As predators, our vision is trained for specific triggers, including movement. That's why flashing lights grab our attention more than static lights. Our vision is also attracted

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to contrast, especially vibrant colors. For example, someone wearing hunter orange will immediately stand out. Product package designers know that and use bold, vibrant color schemes to attract attention. When you walk down the deer nutrition aisle at any major sporting goods store, you’ll feel like you’ve been transported to the Vegas strip, minus the flashing lights.

People also tend to be more visually focused on pictures instead of words. We’re far more likely to recall a subject when it’s accompanied with a stunning image. Have you ever seen a deer food plot seed package that proudly touts a 1-1/2-year-old forkhorn? Of course not, because who wants to plant something that grows forkhorns? You’re more likely to see a massive brute that would be the envy of your hunting buddies. You

want to buy it because you want a buck like that. Elementary, yes, but it still works. If I asked whether a big buck on a bag equals real results, I’m guessing most would say no. But if I placed a bag with an image of a forkhorn next to one with a giant buck, I’m guessing the forkhorn would stay on the shelf.

To identify true differences in quality, read the product contents to know what’s actually behind the pretty picture. Deer mineral is a great example. Many mineral products have big deer on the bag, but if you look at the label, you see it’s almost 100 percent salt — the same salt you can buy at a feed store in a plain bag. Does the product have the crucial macro and trace minerals and vitamins deer require, and are they in the right amounts, from the right sources and in the right ratios

to make it effective? Does that mean a deer mineral with the picture of a big buck is not a good product? No, but the picture doesn’t provide evidence of its performance.

**PROMISES**

This is probably one of my favorite marketing components in deer nutritional management products. The promises and claims on packaging and advertisements of many products are at least a stretch and borderline preposterous at worst.

Two of my favorites are, “Grow big bucks,” and, “Bring big bucks for miles.” Can a high-quality, high-nutrition food plot help bucks grow larger, and can good food attract deer, including mature bucks? Absolutely, but you must consider two things.

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First, it takes many factors to have big bucks on your property, not simply a food plot. Further, the average size of a mature buck varies from region to region. You probably won't grow a Midwest-sized buck in Florida by simply planting a food plot. A highly nutritious food plot can help you realize the genetic potential for the area, but other management practices must be in play. Are you improving habitat, managing your herd density and letting immature bucks walk? Merely planting a food plot does not mean you should get your record-book-entry paperwork ready.

The same can be said about claims of attracting big bucks to a food plot. It has to be highly attractive, but you also can't continuously blow out an area by making poor human pressure decisions. Mature bucks are extremely wary, and they won't come to the most delicious food during daylight if they're over pressured. An attractive plot can help attract deer, but it's not a guarantee and not the only factor.

Ultimately, a statement is just a statement, and if it's unregulated, you can pretty much say what you want.

### ENDORSEMENTS

I won't spend lots of time on this because I think most people don't tie purchasing decisions to celebrity endorsements. Those folks are being paid to endorse a product. Some have integrity, but others would hook their name to a product provided it was accompanied by a paycheck. I won't mention names, but I know a couple of examples in which endorsers hadn't scratched an inch of dirt in their lives let alone have the scientific or practical credentials to give worthwhile advice. I have nothing against celebrity endorsements, but I put the most stock in folks who have used a product year after year with continued success, especially if there are multiple examples of similar testimony.

### REALITY

You can't believe all you're told,

which I think we know. But some pretty shrewd marketing folks know our weaknesses and how to use them. So what's the answer? Don't believe anything? I wouldn't go that far, but I would take marketing ploys with a grain of salt and approach them with research and verification.

It doesn't take much to throw together a food plot mix from some seed varieties at a local farm store, and there's a chance it will grow, and deer might even eat it. But is there any research behind that mix? Is the product living up to its claims and providing high-quality nutrition, and has it been tested and proven across the whitetail's range and through multiple growing seasons? Extremely few products can back that up, but one that can is packaged in an unassuming bag that's far from audacious. It has been around for years, and the graphics and wording on the bag have changed little. It has an impressive buck on the front, but that's also the logo of the company. The product is called Imperial Whitetail Clover, and



The advertisement features a large, vibrant image of a turkey in a field. In the top center, there is a circular logo for "WHITETAIL INSTITUTE" with a deer head and the text "THE BOUNTY OF AMERICA Since 1988". The main headline "SCRATCH ONE UP" is written in large, white, bold letters across the middle. In the bottom left corner, there is a bag of "Turkey Select CHUFA" attractant, labeled as "#1 Turkey Attractant" and "IMPERIAL WHITETAIL". In the bottom right corner, a red banner contains the text "DON'T MISS YOUR WINDOW! LIMITED SUPPLIES PRE-ORDER TODAY Order NOW to guarantee your spring planting!". Below the turkey image, the text "TURKEY SELECT CHUFA" is written in bold, followed by a description: "Turkey Select is a high-quality chufa seed that attracts and holds turkeys on your property. Chufa plantings are considered by many to be the #1 attractant for turkeys. The nut-like tubers produced by Turkey Select are scratched up and devoured by turkeys." At the very bottom, the text "ORDER TODAY! 800-688-3030 www.whitetailinstitute.com 239 Whitetail Trail, Pintlala, AL 36043" is displayed.

# SCRATCH ONE UP

**DON'T MISS YOUR WINDOW!**  
LIMITED SUPPLIES PRE-ORDER TODAY  
Order NOW to guarantee your spring planting!

## TURKEY SELECT CHUFA

Turkey Select is a high-quality chufa seed that attracts and holds turkeys on your property. Chufa plantings are considered by many to be the #1 attractant for turkeys. The nut-like tubers produced by Turkey Select are scratched up and devoured by turkeys.

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“THERE’S MORE DATA TO BACK CLAIMS ABOUT WHITETAIL INSTITUTE PRODUCTS THAN ANYTHING ELSE ON THE MARKET.”

although it has been around for three-and-a-half decades, it continues to set the standard on claim legitimacy.

Now you might say, “Hey, wait a minute, didn’t you tell me you were a marketing guy? So how do I know this isn’t some of the BS you warned me about?” As mentioned, you have to research whether a product stands up to its claims.

First, the product was created and continues to be improved by renowned Ph.D. agronomists and plant breeders. The critical word is created, as it remains the only clover variety bred specifically for white-tailed deer food plots. It boasts protein levels in the mid 30s, but the boast is backed up by reams of nutritional analysis. It has been tested through hundreds of field research plots from Canada to Alabama and

Maine to the Rockies. Millions of acres of Imperial Whitetail Clover have been planted by hundreds of thousands of customers, with great results. To my knowledge no other food plot product can boast such a track record.

Whitetail Institute’s slogan says “Research = Results,” and that isn’t just a cute marketing phrase. Every new product from Whitetail undergoes many years of rigorous testing in field trials across the country before it comes to market. In fact, most don’t make it to market — only the ones that can stand up to the strict scrutiny Institute researchers use.

**CONCLUSION**

No one likes to have the wool pulled over their eyes, because there’s something about being told partial truths or

falsehoods that anger us. And putting in a food plot isn’t a free endeavor. The time it requires is equally important. You need to look beyond packaging, claims and endorsements to find out if what you’re buying is worth the time and money spent. You might think, “Of course he’s writing about a Whitetail Institute product; it’s the company’s magazine.” That doesn’t discount the facts when you dig into them, nor does it make it untrue. In fact, there’s more data to back claims about Whitetail Institute products than anything else on the market.

The point is to look beyond face value. Dig deeper and find out if a product can prove itself.



PHOTO BY JASON SMY

RESEARCH EQUALS  
RESULTS

WHITETAIL INSTITUTE CONCEAL

Imperial Whitetail Conceal is designed to create thick cover, screens, funnels or other types of strategic plantings. A blend of tall growing seed varieties, growing at different heights to produce foliage up to 8 ft tall.

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