

# CROP PROTECTION CHEMICALS - OUR BIGGEST CONCERN

DR. EARL C. SPURRIER

## VICE PRESIDENT, STATE AFFAIRS NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL CHEMICALS ASSOCIATION

1990 was an interesting year. What happened and what will happen, both in the federal and state legislative/regulatory environment, will, I believe, have significant impact on how we farm well into the next century. Many of the issues, can be positively influenced by industry producers and marketers. Hopefully our agricultural production can be made even more environmentally responsive to future needs.

Today, I would like to review some significant legislative developments that took place in 1990 and how we all may be impacted by those actions as we go about doing our business.

### A. The 1990 FARM BILL

The 1990 Farm Bill was, in many respects, an environmental bill. There are many significant parts, but I will elaborate on just a few that are relevant here today. Authorization for funding to support minor use/crop registrations and research will be discussed separately because of its great importance to you.

#### 1. Organic Food Certification

For the first time, there is national legislation that: a) defines organically produced products, b) establishes national standards governing the labeling of organically produced products, c) assures consumers that organically produced products meet consistent standards and d) facilitates interstate commerce in fresh and processed food that is organically produced. Such legislation and forthcoming regulations will provide stability in this market and provide further assurance to the public that they will be getting what they are paying for.

#### 2. Wetland Reserve Programs

The administration policy of no net loss of wetlands will be further substantiated with a broader policy which defines a wetland, assists owners of eligible lands in restoring and protecting wetlands and provides for a mechanism to return or convert wetlands to original conditions. Conservation of the nation's wetlands is a serious environmental issue as waterfront construction and development is destroying millions of acres of wetland resources.

#### 3. Water Quality Demonstration and Pilot Programs

These programs support best management practices to reduce contamination and pollution of our nation's surface and groundwater resources. This is, perhaps, the most critical issue that we have to date. Substantial sums of money are being devoted to programs to help prevent these problems at both the national and state levels.

#### 4. Development of Agricultural Water Quality Protection Plans

Promotes feasible water quality practices that encourage safe chemical storage on the farm and in dealerships, safe mixing and loading of fertilizers and pesticides at application time, proper storage and handling of animal wastes on the farm, better timing

and sequencing of agronomic practices and providing information to producers to help evaluate effectiveness of these practices to protect water resources. These plans will be implemented with the help of USDA, SCS and the State Land Grant College Extension Services.

5. Sustainable Agricultural Research and Education will receive ongoing attention.
6. Pesticide Record Keeping is new for a farm bill requirement.

It provides that certified applicators including farmers maintain records on use of restricted use products for 2 years and that those records be made available to federal and state agencies upon request. But, there is the requirement that those records, when submitted, must be granted confidential protection.

## **B. MINOR USE/CROP REGISTRATION EFFORTS**

The registration of minor crops or uses is of extreme importance to growers of fruits and vegetables and many other crops of high value and low acreage. Also continued registration of certain major crop protection chemicals for minor use is critical. Data developed under stringent protocols are required to re-register all pesticides. The high costs of generating data many times exceeds any possibility of recovering these costs through the limited sales of the product. As the result, thousands of products are being dropped. Voluntary cancellation of small volume products for which data will not be supplied will have a great impact on your pest control programs. Such a situation poses a particular dilemma for minor crop producers.

Efforts are continuing to raise the minor use registration to a much higher national profile. Numerous meetings with the Bush administration, EPA, USDA, IR-4 and industry have taken place. The 1990 Congress was persuaded to authorize the appropriation of about twenty-five million dollars through the USDA to support minor efforts through IR-4 and devote more attention to the issue. Approximately three million dollars will be expended in 1991 to IR-4. Ongoing discussion with industry, state organizations, commodity groups, associations and state legislatures are now addressing the problem. A national task force involving USDA, EPA, IR-4 and the chemical industry has been organized to work with grower groups in an effort to assist them in registering as many key chemicals as possible. In addition to funding authorization, the 1990 Farm Bill also provided legislative authority to : 1) relax registration requirements so as to reduce the costs for registration, (2) waive certain registration fees that may economically impede the registration, (3) allow the EPA administrator to delay a voluntary cancellation by a registrant by ninety days to allow third party registrants to assume a registration, (4) require the USDA to study and identify minor crop uses and needs, availability of alternative pesticides and factors that limit the availability of minor use pesticides.

## **C. WATER QUALITY**

Nothing is as important as protecting the integrity of our nations water resources. This issue is a primary national concern. All phases of society are involved. Agriculture, in particular, has been addressing the issue for a long time. Nitrates, and certain agricultural chemicals have been detected in surface and groundwater. However, based on EPA, state and industry surveys which reported data from thousands of monitoring samples, revealed that there are detections but that the nation's water is still of very high quality. The situation is not as bad as originally perceived.

Prudent programs through state legislation have been put into place in about twenty states beginning when the first evidence of chemical detection was announced. The EPA just recently completed and reported the results of an extensive Pesticides in Well Water Survey. They found very little to be excited about. Monsanto Agricultural Company in St. Louis has completed a comparable study and its results were essentially confirmed by the EPA survey. The EPA results showed that: (1) nitrates were detected in fifty percent of the wells but 98-99% were within EPA safe drinking water standards, (2) pesticides were found in four percent of private wells and ten percent in public wells and that 99% of all wells contain no pesticide traces exceeding EPA drinking water standards.

But every user of pesticides whether a dealer, applicator or home owner has a responsibility to better understand how chemicals can get into water resources. Best management practices, prompt rinsing of containers using the rinsate in the sprayer as a spray diluent and properly disposing the container preferably through a county or state collection recycling program can contribute greatly to the protection of our water resources. Most contamination of drinking water wells appear to be associated with shallow or improperly cased wells. Surface water running in to the well can contaminate the well water with nitrates, bacteria and other pollutants. Soil erosion contributes to surface water pollution. Soil conservation practices plus good applicator practices can work well together in helping avoid surface water contamination. Federal and state educational programs sponsored by 1990 Farm Bill legislation are designed to identify possible sources for contamination, educate on prevention and mitigation procedures which should help reduce problems in rural and public drinking water resources. All federal agencies will be involved.

#### **D. FOOD SAFETY**

Public perception that our nation's food supply is suspect and probably not safe has absolutely no basis or substantiation. In fact, our food supply is the safest in the world. Pesticide residues are not a problem. Our nations foremost scientists and policy makers will confirm the safety of our food. This is not to say that our food system cannot be improved because it can. Every effort is being made through legislation and regulations to further bolster both the federal and state monitoring and control of food products.

Federal efforts to change antiquated procedures and to take advantage of new analytical procedures, risk assessment techniques and to accept new concepts dealing with both natural and man made constituents of food are underway. Microbial and bacterial contamination of food supplies, according to micro-biologists, are far bigger contributors to unsafe food supplies than the contribution of minuscule pesticide residues. Both FDA and the State of California, where thousands of produce samples are continuously analyzed, show that only a very small fraction of domestic and imported food fail to meet legal food tolerances and standards.

More importantly a greater issue to all growers and producers in the United States is the need to have uniform food tolerances established by the U.S. EPA. Uniform national tolerances provide consistent food standards from state to state and allow shipments of produce from farms, orchards or ranches to be shipped any where in the country and the world. Without uniform tolerances, interstate shipments could be curtailed. Each state would have their own individual standards or tolerances and such a situation would create a nightmare for producers who ship out-of-state. Also, there is a great need to revamp the Delaney Amendment and establish a more reasonable risk assessment procedure through

federal legislation in 1991.

American Farmers, fruit and vegetable producers should be very proud of the job they are doing to provide ample supplies of wholesome, nutritious and low priced food to the American public and for export to other nations. Legislation and regulation is designed to create a level playing field for all persons within the agricultural production industry. How we as an industry perform today will determine how well we will survive in the future.