

PESTICIDES

The EPA has recently published a brief entitled "Ag 101" which acknowledges that while both the public and the press have increasingly focused on the negative impacts of agricultural, urban industrial, and residential chemicals, there are, in fact, substantial benefits of their use:

Pesticides are the only effective means of controlling disease organisms, weeds, and insect pests in many circumstances

Consumers receive direct benefits through wider selections and lower prices for food and clothing

Pesticides protect private, public, and commercial dwellings from structural damage from termite infestations

Pesticides contribute to enhanced human health by preventing disease outbreaks through control of rodent and insect populations

Pesticides are used to sanitize our drinking and recreational water

Pesticides are used to disinfect indoor areas (e. g., kitchens, operating rooms, nursing homes) as well as dental and surgical instruments

The pesticide industry also provides benefits to society. For instance, local communities and state governments may be partially dependent upon the jobs and tax base that manufacturers, distributors, dealers, commercial applicators, and farmers provide

It is, perhaps, useful to be reminded of these desirable benefits, but they address only tangentially the issues which concern the LWVUS, namely, overuse of pesticides and possible negative impacts on human and environmental health.

A recent EPA report on the years 2000-2007 showed that pesticide use was actually decreasing (from 948 million pounds to 877 million pounds annually), but that there were already indications that use would begin to increase again with the emergence of new pests and pesticide tolerant weeds. On the other hand, the use of the herbicide glyphosphate (e. g., "Roundup" among others) had doubled in that same period from 90 million to 180 pounds annually. To address the cumulative risks of this emerging scenario, new crop management practices are being introduced by farmers themselves, namely, an integrated, tiered approach to pest management which includes continuous monitoring of pesticide impacts, crop rotation, and "trap crop" planting, used to lure pests away from cultivated fields.

With respect to human health, the EPA has so far determined that pesticide chemical residues on food and in water are well below the tolerance levels they have set. Nevertheless, there is mounting evidence from a variety of independent

studies that the real world impact of these chemicals must take into account the presence of more than one chemical in the residues commonly found on and in our food. Therefore, we simply do not know, because of a lack of different, improved, and independent testing, what “acceptable levels” actually are.

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