

EPA to propose banning chlorpyrifos insecticide

Proposed revocation still subject to negotiation

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**
Capital Press

The federal government said June 30 that it's planning to ban chlorpyrifos, a common insecticide, but may change its mind based on consultations with the chemical's manufacturer.

The U.S. Environmental

Protection Agency's tentative decision to revoke all "tolerances" for residues of the insecticide on crops came in response to a request from environmental groups.

Pesticide Action Network North America and the Natural Resources Defense Council claim that exposure to the chemical causes farmworkers' children to experience long-term health problems, among other problems.

The EPA is signaling that it may take action on chlorpyrifos

but "there are many opportunities for going astray and failing to protect communities from this chemical," said Paul Towers, spokesperson for PANNA.

The groups petitioned EPA to prohibit chlorpyrifos based on numerous risks in 2007, but the agency did not take final action on the request, arguing it would take time to study the issue.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals recently ordered the EPA to make up its mind, which led to the filing of the June 30 report in which the agency said

it would propose canceling all chlorpyrifos tolerances by April 2016.

While it was initially inclined to deny the petition in favor of "additional risk mitigation action" to reduce hazards, the EPA is now "less confident" it can achieve that goal without formal regulatory proceedings, the report said.

In some watersheds, potential exposure to the chemical through drinking water and other pathways has prevented the agency from finding "that

there is a reasonable certainty of no harm to people who would be drinking such water," the report said.

The EPA noted that threats to agricultural employees may also justify new restrictions on the chemical.

Before proposing the revocation, though, the agency plans to conduct an in-depth assessment to see which watersheds are most vulnerable to chlorpyrifos contamination.

The EPA also plans to ne-

gotiate with the chemical's manufacturers to potentially revise the pesticide label and avoid hazardous applications of chlorpyrifos rather than have the chemical tolerances revoked.

Towers, of PANNA, said he's concerned that any changes agreed to by manufacturers will fall short of what's necessary to protect human health.

"The proof will come months down the road," he said.

Farm use of drones to take off as feds loosen restrictions

By **MARY CLARE JALONICK**
Associated Press

CORDOVA, Md. (AP) — Mike Geske wants a drone.

Watching a flying demonstration on Maryland's Eastern Shore, the Missouri farmer envisions using an unmanned aerial vehicle to monitor the irrigation pipes on his farm — a job he now pays three men to do.

"The savings on labor and fuel would just be phenomenal," Geske says, watching as a small white drone hovers over a nearby corn field and transmits detailed pictures of the growing stalks to an iPad.

Nearby, farmer Chip Bowling tries his hand at flying one of the drones. Bowling, president of the National Corn Growers Association, says he would like to buy one for his Maryland farm to help him scout out which individual fields need extra spraying.

Another farmer, Bobby Hutchison, says he is hoping the man he hires weekly to walk his fields and observe his crops gets a drone, to make the process more efficient and accurate.

"I see it very similar to how I saw the computer when it first started," says Hutchison, 64. "It was a no-brainer."

Farmers are eager for the technology.

The small, relatively inexpensive vehicles could replace humans in a variety of ways around large farms: transmitting detailed information about crops to combines and sprayers, directing them very precisely to problem spots and cutting down on the amount of water and chemicals that a farmer needs to use in those areas.

The Association for Unmanned Vehicle Systems International, a trade group, says agriculture could account for 80 percent of all commercial drone use.

Agricultural use of drones is about to take off after being grounded for years by the lack of federal guidelines. The Federal Aviation Administration has approved more than 50 exemptions for farm-related operations since January.

Companies with those exemptions say business has grown, helped by quick advances in the technology.

Bret Chilcott of Kansas-based AgEagle, which sells unmanned aerial vehicles and the software to help operate them, says his company took its first orders last year. Now it has a backlog of several hundred orders. He says the technology has transformed the market during that short period.

"Last year users had to land their aircraft and then take the data to the computer," he says. "Now the data appears on your

iPad or hand-held device a few minutes after flight."

That data could be pictures, 3-D images of plants, thermal readings of crops or animals or other observations that a drone could make while in the air. Information that in the past took days to collect — or could not have been collected at all — can be gathered now in minutes or hours and, in some cases, integrated with separate data collected from other high-tech farm machinery.

Chilcott is optimistic that the technology to scout out problem spots so precisely will be transformative because farmers can limit spraying just to those places.

"In five years we won't have to blanket a field with chemicals," he says.

Still, most farmers cannot legally fly the vehicles yet.

The FAA is working on rules that would allow the drones to be used regularly for business while maintaining certain safety and privacy standards. An FAA proposal this year would allow flight of the vehicles as long as they weigh less than 55 pounds, stay within the operator's sight and fly during the daytime, among other restrictions. Operators would have to pass an FAA test of aeronautical knowledge and a Transportation Security Administration background check.

Thomas Haun of North Carolina-based PrecisionHawk, another company with an exemption, says it is unclear what the business will look like eventually. Farmers may hire services that have unmanned aerial vehicles or every farm may get its own drone. Most likely, it will be a combination.

Haun says the proposed rules are appropriate. "It's pretty spot on for where the technology is right now," he says.

Some people have concerns about the guidelines. Pilots of crop dusters and other planes that operate around farms are concerned the rules do not go far enough to ensure safety.

"We can't see them," says Andrew Moore of the National Agricultural Aviation Association. His group advocated for the unmanned vehicles to include tracking systems or lights to help airplanes figure out where they are, but that was not included in the proposal.

The rules could pose some challenges for the eager farmers, too.

Geske may not be able to use drones efficiently to monitor all the irrigation pipes on his 2,100 acre Missouri farm if he has to keep them within sight. He's still interested, though. The men he hires now use a lot of fuel and their trucks tear up his land and roads.

"You can wait forever on advancing technology," Geske says.



John O'Connell/Capital Press

Emily Tolley, an agricultural student at Brigham Young University-Idaho, stands by a display promoting the 200 Bushel Club at a June 24 field day hosted by Thresher Artisan Wheat in Fort Hall, Idaho. Tolley is an intern for the club, helping to organize its trials to boost wheat yields and to collect data from them.

Intern, retired professor gathering data for Idaho's 200 Bushel Club

By **JOHN O'CONNELL**
Capital Press

FORT HALL, Idaho — An informal organization formed by major players in Eastern Idaho's cereal industry to explore options for boosting wheat yields has hired an intern and plans to collect more complete data from this season's field trials.

Thus far, the 200 Bushel Club — formed in 2011 following a meeting called by Brett Wilken, formerly of General Mills — has offered growers mostly anecdotal evidence of how various agronomic practices can affect output.

This season, the club's intern, Brigham Young University-Idaho agricultural student Emily Tolley, and retired BYU-Idaho agricultural professor Greg Blaser set up trials in eight commercial fields from Blackfoot to Ammon and are keeping detailed records.

Partners in the club in-

clude Thresher Artisan Wheat, the Idaho Wheat Commission, University of Idaho, Bingham Cooperative, McGregor Co., WestBred, Silver K Farms and the Nature Conservancy.

Tolley will keep records in areas such as plant growth stages, water application, pests and diseases, plant height, stand count, soil compaction, kernel size and number and test weight.

Each field offers a unique trial, testing practices such as variable-rate fertilizer application, tillage, bed preparation and residue management.

In one trial, Tolley tested a new wheat drill to the region, called a Lemken, which she found contributed to an ideal bed and consistent growth. In another field, she planted grain at 2 mph, 4 mph and 6 mph to evaluate how much yield farmers might sacrifice when they rush to plant.

Wilken, now with Thresher, said participants have noticed the largest yield bumps

have come simply by placing greater emphasis on basic principles of wheat farming.

Bradford Warner, vice president of marketing with Thresher's parent company, Agspring, hopes to have club results posted online at thresherwheat.com within two months.

"All 200 Bushel Club results are something we want to share as widely as possible with our growers," Warner told growers at a recent Thresher meeting in Fort Hall. "As you have topics where you think we should be looking deeper or things we have missed, I encourage you to talk with your elevator manager."

Warner said the club will delve more deeply into cover crops next season.

Nature Conservancy Conservation Manager Dayna Gross said her organization contributed funds toward the club's intern to help quantify how good environmental practices can also cost-effec-

tively improve yields.

"We're working on sustainable intensification," Gross said. "If we can produce more per acre, we don't need to expand that footprint."

In the future, Gross said, the club may offer a fellowship through UI to involve a Ph.D. student in its efforts.

Cathy Wilson, director of research collaboration with the Idaho Wheat Commission, said most of the club's trials to date have involved irrigated winter wheat planted after potatoes. Wilson has been especially interested in club trials focusing on fertilizer application at different plant growth stages and is eager to have hard data.

"It's really easy to get trials out in fields. It's much more difficult to get all of the data and observe them as frequently as you need to," Wilson said. "We knew eventually we'd have to hire somebody to be the field technician for our group."

Biologists: Second set of pups for wandering wolf OR-7

GRANTS PASS, Ore. (AP) — Biologists have found evidence that Oregon's famous wandering wolf, OR-7, has fathered a second set of pups.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife announced Tuesday that when biologists were picking up trail cameras set to record OR-7's Rogue Pack in the Cascades east of Medford, they found fresh scat confirming a second set of

pups, though just how many is not known.

The trail cameras captured pictures June 24 of two yearlings from OR-7's first set of three pups born last year.

OR-7 became famous when he left northeastern Oregon and traveled across the state and into Northern California in search of a mate. He eventually found one and fathered the first wolf pack in southwestern Oregon in more than six decades.



Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

OR-7, the wolf that wandered to the Rogue River drainage from northeastern Oregon, is seen in this file photo. It and its mate have had a second set of pups, biologists say.

Japanese millers follow Northwest wheat harvest

U.S. Wheat executive: Trade teams build confidence in supply

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

Customers from Japan are following the Pacific Northwest wheat harvest this week.

The Idaho and Oregon wheat commissions and the Washington Grain Commission are hosting four Japanese milling executives July 5-12. The tour includes a county elevator and terminal elevator in Lewiston, Idaho; a tour of Genesee, Idaho, wheat grower Joe Anderson's farm; meeting with Washington State University wheat breeders; and touring the Portland export terminal.

Japan is the top customer for the region's wheat farm-

ers, said Steve Wirsching, vice president of U.S. Wheat Associates in Portland.

"We often say that the Japanese market will take one out of every four bushels of wheat exported (in the Pacific Northwest)," he said. "They're the single-largest buyer of soft white wheat."

In the 2014-2015 marketing year, Japan purchased 986,000 metric tons of soft white wheat, up from 865,000 metric tons in 2013-2014, according to U.S. Wheat.

Japanese buyers use western white wheat, a blend that's 80 percent soft white wheat and 20 percent club wheat, a subclass of the soft white wheat variety. They

use it to bake cakes, cookies and pastries.

Trade teams from Japan typically tour the region each summer. Individual companies also send teams to meet with commissions and growers, Wirsching said. Another group is slated to visit the region in September.

"The relationship built with the Japanese market over the last 50-plus years is very strong," he said.

The millers are interested in the quality of this year's crop, Wirsching said.

"These trade missions help build confidence in our ability to be a reliable supplier and provide a consistent, high-quality product," Wirsching said.

"When we take them out to a country elevator or farm, we're showing them our supply chain and educating them about how we produce wheat ... and how we move that wheat into the market and over to Japan."

Wirsching said he believes both countries are looking forward to better trade relations under the Trans Pacific Partnership agreement that's being negotiated among 12 Pacific Rim nations. Congress recently approved trade promotion authority for the president.

"It's seen overseas that our administration is serious about negotiating these free-trade agreements," Wirsching said. "Through these trade agreements, we'll just have more economic activity and growth. Both economies will benefit."



AP Photo/Alex Brandon

A DJI Phantom 3 drone is flown June 11 by Matthew Creger, marketing director for Intelligent UAS, during a drone demonstration at a farm and winery on potential use for board members of the National Corn Growers in Cordova, Md.