

Washington

State AG targets chemical ‘incredibly important’ to farmers

5 states, D.C. challenge EPA

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

Washington Attorney General Bob Ferguson has joined the fight to ban the country's most widely used insecticide, a chemical the USDA said has successfully warded off unpredictable pests for more than 50 years and is "incredibly important to U.S. agriculture."

Ferguson, a Democrat, and attorneys general from four other states on the East Coast and the District of Columbia moved July 5 to participate in a lawsuit aimed at prohibiting chlorpyrifos.

"Washington consumers, farmworkers and farm oper-

ators deserve an administration that respects science and cares about the risks to their health," Ferguson said in a written statement.

The Environmental Protection Agency in March rejected a petition filed in 2007 by the Pesticide Action Network of North America and Natural Resources Defense Council to declare any residue of chlorpyrifos on food unsafe, effectively outlawing its use on commercial crops.

The EPA was reacting to a deadline set by the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals to rule on the petition by March 31. The EPA said that despite several years of study, the science was unresolved. Congress has directed the EPA to complete a review of chlorpyrifos by 2020.



Bob Ferguson

The EPA said it was reviewing the suit.

Washington, New York, Massachusetts, Maryland, Vermont and D.C. filed to intervene in the suit as the guardians of "millions of citizens who are potentially exposed to unsafe" levels of chlorpyrifos on food or while working on farms.

Ferguson accused the Trump administration of "ignoring science."

"President Trump's EPA is willfully ignoring scientific

evidence that chlorpyrifos is harmful to human health," Ferguson said.

Washington Friends of Farms and Forests director Heather Hansen said Friday that the lawsuit seeks to preempt the EPA's scientific review.

"We're concerned about this new lawsuit. We think it misses the big scientific picture," she said. "We agree with the attorney general about the importance of protecting Washington citizens, but we think these allegations are the wrong way to go."

Measured by pounds of active ingredient, chlorpyrifos is the most widely used insecticide in the country, according to the EPA.

Banning chlorpyrifos could affect many of Washington's most valuable crops,

including apples, grapes and wheat, according to comments the state Department of Agriculture submitted to the EPA.

WSDA said it consulted with Washington State University and that crops most at risk would include sweet corn, onions and mint. WSDA asked the EPA to allow chlorpyrifos to continue to be used on those crops.

Ferguson's office linked his intervention in this case to other actions he's taken against Trump policies, including a travel ban on residents of some Muslim-majority countries, emissions from new oil and gas facilities, and energy efficiency rules for ceiling fans.

The 9th Circuit Court ordered the Obama administration in 2015 to rule on the

petition to ban chlorpyrifos. The Obama administration's EPA subsequently concluded it couldn't determine whether all existing uses of chlorpyrifos were safe and proposed a ban.

At the time, the Obama administration's USDA complained that the EPA had overestimated the public's exposure to chlorpyrifos and drew a "mistaken conclusion" that the insecticide was not safe.

The USDA stressed the insecticide's importance and success since it was introduced in 1965 by the Dow Chemical Co.

The court pushed the EPA to make a final decision before the end of 2016, but the Obama administration won a three-month delay, leaving the final decision to the Trump administration.



Oregon State University

Farmers should scout their fields for the wheat head armyworm larva, which can reduce wheat yields, researchers say.

Farmers warned to look for wheat head armyworm

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

Eastern Washington farmers should keep an eye out for wheat head armyworm larvae or the pest's adult moth as they scout their fields.

Washington State University researchers haven't received any calls yet, but it's the time of year for the pest to show up, said Diana Roberts, regional specialist with WSU Extension in Spokane.

Farmers should look in areas the insect has been a pest before, such as Reardan and Davenport, but it has also migrated in recent years toward Edwall and Sprague, Roberts said.

Oregon State University, the University of Idaho and WSU recently released a publication about managing the wheat head armyworm "complex." The true wheat head armyworm is an invasive species for the region. The false wheat head army worm is a native species and the prominent pest in the region. Genetic testing showed the two are closely related. Both cause damage.

"The puzzle is why it took 120 years of wheat cultivation for it to become a problem," Roberts said. "It's hard to

Online
<http://bit.ly/2sllVKC>

study because it comes and goes."

She suspects changing climates and changes in cropping systems have been factors.

The moths resurfaced in the Pacific Northwest from 2012 through 2014 but weren't found last year, likely because populations haven't had a chance to rebuild, Roberts said.

In isolated field trials, the wheat head armyworm caused as much as 35 percent yield loss, Roberts said.

"A lot of what they do is cause grain dockage at harvest, because the kernels come out looking broken," Roberts said.

Insecticides are available, but Roberts recommends natural options such as parasitic wasps to avoid harming beneficial insects. She emphasizes scouting for larvae in the field.

"We don't recommend spraying at the first sight of it," she said. "You're never going to eradicate an insect by doing that — they're too crafty."

E. Washington family honored for 60 years of test plots

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

LAMONT, Wash. — Gil White and his family have always been keen on research. They have assisted Washington State University scientists for the past six decades.

"It started with Grandpa, down to my dad and then to me," the Lamont, Wash., farmer said.

WSU officials honored the White family this week for 60 years of offering their land for test plots. Gil White was presented with a plaque during a lunch between crop tours in St. John, Wash., and Lamont.

Gil White is a fourth-generation farmer and has been farming for 35 years. His grandfather, Curtis "Frank" White, started offering land for test plots, and Gil's father, Curtis, continued the practice.

Curtis White died May 31,



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Washington State University Extension regional educator Steve Van Vleet, left, honors Lamont, Wash., farmer Gil White and his family for 60 years of offering their land for wheat variety field trials during a lunchtime celebration in St. John, Wash.

Gil White said.

Field trials in growers' fields allow researchers to examine the performance of wheat varieties in different areas. Whitman County alone has five climatic zones, said Steve Van Vleet, WSU Extension

regional educator.

The Whites' participation benefits other Lamont farmers by helping breeders determine the best varieties with the best disease resistance for that particular growing zone, Van Vleet said.

Offering land to the university for free for six decades is rare, Van Vleet said. The Mills family of St. John, Wash., was honored in 2016 for participating in 60 years of variety trials.

Other farms have done it for 20 to 30 years, Van Vleet said.

"The nice thing about it is we can look at different varieties and see what works and what doesn't work," Gil White said. "We kinda get a jump on what's going on."

Retired farmer Randy Sues, a former Washington Grain Commission member, made the commemorative plaque for the Whites and the Millses from maple and padauk, an African redwood Sues likes for its color.

"Having the test plots for that long is extremely rare," Sues said. "Some people have them for a couple years and then they move on and do other stuff."

Washington irrigation innovator Ron Van Gundy dies

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

Ron Van Gundy, who managed one of Washington's most important and most drought-vulnerable irrigation districts for 20 years, died July 6 after a long illness.

He was 73.

Van Gundy retired as manager of the Roza Irrigation District in the Yakima Basin in 2002 because of health problems, but continued to work part-time for the district as policy director. He marked 49 years with the district in April. He had been in declining health related to a respiratory illness, said Tom Myrum, executive director of the Washington State Water Resources Association.

Colleagues said that Van Gundy was an innovator who guided the Roza district through many droughts. He



Ron Van Gundy

was a key figure in developing broad support among farmers, tribes, environmental groups and government agencies for a still-unfolding plan to increase water supplies for farms, fish and cities in the Yakima Valley.

The Roza district irrigates some 72,000 acres in the state's most valuable farm region, but its members are subject to curtailments by the Bureau of Reclamation in water-short years.

The district's current manager, Scott Revell, said Van Gundy's experience helped the district get through the 2015 drought, one of the most severe in state history.

"We sat down with him, and he said, 'Here's the things that work, and here's the things that

don't work, and we're only going to do the things that work,'" Revell said.

Van Gundy was "way, way ahead of the curve" in investing in water conservation in the 1980s and it paid off as the district's farmers received less than half their normal water allotment, Revell said.

"The reason we made it through in 2015 with 44 percent was because of everything Ron did in the '80s and '90s," Revell said. "He was a titan in water resources."

Van Gundy was the longest-serving employee in district history and also was the longest-serving manager, according to Revell. He was hired by the district in 1968 and promoted to assistant manager in 1971. He was named manager in 1982.

Van Gundy served on the Water Resources Association board of directors between

1982 and 2013. He represented the association of irrigation districts as well as his own district in Olympia before the association hired a lobbyist, Myrum said.

"Ron was super smart," Myrum said. "That guy was a repository of information that was available on demand."

"The information he held in his brain you can't find in an archive," Myrum said.

The association awarded Van Gundy its Distinguished Service Award in December.

"We are saddened by the passing of a man who stood tall in the water resources community for decades," the association's president, Dave Solem, said in a written statement. "He will be remembered for his drive toward efficient water use, developing new water storage in the Yakima Basin and his collaborative approach toward achieving those goals."

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