

Specialist: Glyphosate link to cancer unfounded

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

TWIN FALLS, Idaho – While glyphosate has lower toxicity than many pesticides — it’s rated zero risk for homeowner use — the news and social media are laden with its purported health risks to humans, especially cancer.

But those claims are out of step with scientific risk assessments related to exposure, Ronda Hirnyck, University of Idaho pesticide coordinator, said during a pesticide seminar at this year’s Agri-Action.

Part of the issue with glyphosate or Roundup — a Monsanto product used to treat weeds in some GMO crops — is that everybody’s heard about it. And there are a lot of people who don’t like GMOs or Monsanto, she said.

“A lot of it is emotional,” she said.

There are also a lot of cancer campaigns and other health-related concerns and environmental concerns.



Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press
Ronda Hirnyck, University of Idaho Extension pesticide coordinator, says glyphosate poses no threat to human health.

The use of glyphosate, tied to some GMO crops, has shot up over the last few years, and it’s an easy item to pick on, she said.

“It’s just kind of on everybody’s radar,” she said.

But the public doesn’t understand how it functions or its benefits, she said.

Glyphosate binds tightly to soil, and it’s not volatile in the environment. It doesn’t percolate in soil to get into groundwater. It inhibits an enzyme that builds proteins a plant needs, and animals and humans don’t produce that enzyme, she said.

“So it doesn’t affect us,” she said.

Studies have shown there’s little to no absorption through the skin, no inhalation risk and no neurotoxicity, she said.

“It does not get into our bodies and accumulate,” she said.

Studies in animals and extrapolated to humans show very, very low toxicity to either, she said. The level

of acute oral toxicity in mice is 10,000 parts per million. In rabbits, the only animal to show any reaction, that level was 2,000 ppm, she said.

“Baking soda has a higher toxicity than glyphosate, all things being equal,” she said.

But cancer is an emotional topic, she said.

Assessments by the Environmental Protection Agency, the European Food Safety Authority and Health Canada found no cancer risks with glyphosate. But the International Agency for Research on Cancer labeled it a “probable carcinogen,” aligning the risk level with its assessment of red meat as a probable carcinogen, she said.

One of IARC’s board members, however, “fessed up” that the board didn’t review all the studies available and should have gone back and looked at newer studies, she said.

“This is what’s confusing people. This is the dilemma. It’s not black and white because these (orga-

nizations) are disagreeing,” she said.

The problem with most studies on a link between glyphosate and non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, the cancer of interest with glyphosate, is that they were small, case-controlled studies with somewhat of a bias, she said.

They only assessed people with the disease and whether they had been exposed to glyphosate and didn’t consider any other life factors, she said.

Those studies had variable results among small groups of people, she said.

The National Institutes of Health did a more comprehensive cohort study, the Agricultural Health Study, of more than 54,000 licensed pesticide applicators beginning in 1993 and found no connection between glyphosate and non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, she said.

But the stories of a link are out there, and agriculture needs help people understand the risks and benefits, she said.

Revisions to pesticide safety requirements still fresh

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

TWIN FALLS, Idaho — It won’t be long until farmers are back in their fields preparing for the next growing season, and it’s a good time to get up to speed on changes to Environmental Protection Agency’s Worker Protection Standard for pesticides.

A lot of concerns and misunderstandings about WPS led EPA to revise the entire program in 2015 to reduce the risk of exposure or injury to workers, Luis Urias, program specialist with Idaho State Department of Agriculture, said during this year’s Agri-Action.

“There are so many changes now, the biggest one is recordkeeping,” he said.

Agricultural employers must display pesticide safety, application and hazard information in a central location for 30 days after the restricted-entry interval at an application site expires and keep them on records for two years, he said.

That information includes an EPA WPS poster, a safety data sheet and application information — including the product name, EPA registration number and active ingredient; crop or site treated, location and description of treated area; and date, start and end times of the application and duration of the restricted-entry interval.

In addition, workers and pesticide handlers must be trained in pesticide safety and those records must also be maintained for two years, he said.

Workers must be trained at least once every 12 months and receive additional training if they enter a restricted area before the restricted interval expires.

Handlers must have been trained within the last 30 days before any handling tasks. Anyone who cleans or repairs pesticide application equipment, including mechanics, and anyone who transports an open pesticide container are considered a handler, he said.

He recommended employers train all their employees as handlers.

Employers must also provide accessible decontamination supplies within a quarter mile of the application.

Those supplies must include at least 1 gallon of water for workers and 3 gallons of water for handlers. Additional water for eye flushing must be provided when a product requires protective eyewear or when handlers are using a closed, pressurized system.

Rep. Barreto proposes \$1.4M for agricultural education

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
EO Media Group

Rep. Greg Barreto introduced a bill to the Oregon House this week that aims to pour more funding into FFA programs around the state.

If passed, it would allot more money for students to attend statewide and national events to build their FFA resumes and develop their skills.

House Bill 2444 would allot \$1.4 million to send FFA students to events like competitions, statewide training programs, leadership courses and state, local and national conventions. It would require the Oregon Department of Education to coordinate with FFA to make sure students can use their FFA educations for college and career



Rep. Greg Barreto

opportunities.

It would also secure \$600,000 in grant money from the Oregon Department of Education to fund extra-duty contracts for agricultural science and technology teachers, and for FFA teachers. The bill had a hearing in the Education Committee on Wednesday. It was scheduled for a work session Monday.

“Instructors should be compensated for the inordinate amount of time commitment, and this program should be supported as part of our education system,” Barreto said in a press release.

Garrett Wiggins, a senior in Echo High School’s



Leah Smith

FFA program, said the funds would give him and his peers some opportunities they might not otherwise get.

“This summer, three of us and our advisor went to Washington, D.C., for a leadership conference,” he said. “We had to raise all the money for that, and it prevented a couple of people from going because they couldn’t raise the funds.”

Leah Smith, advisor for Hermiston High School’s FFA program, said her program would welcome the assistance.

“Any time there’s financial support, a program is going to thrive,” she said.

“One of the most incapacitating factors is a lack of funding.”

The cost of events is prohibitive for many students.

“Families are financially strapped,” Smith said. “The Oregon FFA state convention used to be \$20 per kid. Now it’s \$50 per kid. Costs never go down, and they get passed on to students.”

But the bill would also allot money for FFA advisors and agriculture teachers, something Smith said may be hard to do from a state level, given the differences in each program.

Smith said the funding streams for FFA vary between school districts, but in general, most receive some state funding in the form of stipends for FFA teachers and extended duty contracts.

“It’s separate financial

allotments. The FFA stipend is supposed to be for whatever it takes for you to be an FFA advisor,” Smith said. “And the extended contract is supposed to be what you would call a summer contract.”

But Smith said the level of involvement for advisors varies widely by school.

“There are some programs where the advisors spend a lot of time,” she said. “And some, they may not have the expectation in the community. When you look at funds, it’s hard for the state to say, ‘each ag teacher should get this much money for extra duty or FFA.’”

Hermiston’s program is thriving, and Smith said she and other agricultural science teachers spend a lot of their own time with the students.

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