

Impact of Government on Pesticide Usage Reviewed

Although views about pesticides have often been polarized, the public generally now has a more rational attitude than was the case just a few years ago.

This opinion was expressed by F. H. Tschirley, a pesticides coordinator with the U. S. Department of Agriculture, in a speech recently at the annual meeting of the Weed Science Society in St. Louis where nearly 1,000 scientists gathered to review research reports about weed control technology.

Tschirley, who discussed the impact of government decisions and attitudes on pest control, said

that manufacturers and others engaged in weed science work may encounter more difficult problems because of the great concern for environmental quality.

He told his audience of week scientists that Rachel Carson's 'Silent Spring' and the attitude it helped to shape led Congress to recognize that gaps existed in information about the secondary effects, fate and metabolism of pesticides. This led to appropriation of funds to conduct the research needed to fill those gaps.

The amount of pesticides being introduced into the environment

is a cause for concern, Tschirley said. In 1970 1.03 billion pounds of synthetic organic pesticides were produced in the U. S. Thirty-nine per cent of that production represents synthetic organic herbicides. For the five years previous to 1970, herbicide production grew at a rate of 13 per cent, compared with 7.5 per cent for all pesticides.

Tschirley said that based on current technology, a five-fold increase in pesticide usage would be needed for a two-fold increase in food and fiber production on the acreage now harvested.

Although there is increasing attention being given to alternate

methods of control, the government scientist said that there is no likelihood that the world will be able to produce and adequate supply of feed, and fiber without the judicious use of pesticides.

Tschirley also pointed out that requirements for data in support of registration have increased steadily, particularly in recent years. While great attention has been given to the active ingredient in pesticides, he believes that greater attention will be given to the various adjuvants that become part of a formulated product. An adjuvant is added to herbicides or insecticides to enhance their ability to stick to foliage.

Manufacturers of pesticides are concerned about the increasing requirements for supporting data and rightly so, Tschirley said.

"I have long believed that industry can provide a product if the regulatory agency gives them reasonably precise parameters within which to operate. Indefinite criteria simply do not permit intelligent business decisions", he said. "When we define the data needed in support of registration, the problems of industry will be eased considerably."

The USDA scientist expressed doubt that industry would be able to provide the broad range of pesticides that will be needed in agriculture.

"There is general agreement," he said, "that greater involvement by the public sector will be needed. Registered pesticides for use in minor crops are of particular concern," he said, and a greater effort would be required to provide crop protection for producers of small-acreage crops.

Decisions on pesticide use patterns, he said, will involve the public to a much greater extent than was the case in the past. The Environmental Protection Agency, he added, is committed to the philosophy that better decisions can be made when the public is involved.

"Concern about pesticides," Tschirley stated, "has led increasingly toward the concept of pest management. This concept

is now firmly entrenched in the collective minds of federal agencies such as USDA, but also EPA and others

"A basic principle of pest management or integrated control is that pests are controlled only when needed, not on a preventive basis. Moreover, the method of control may be chemical, biological, cultural, or combinations of two or more methods. There has been much rhetoric for many years about integrated control", Tschirley said, "but now decisions have been made for action that will give impetus to the concept."

To support this observation Tschirley cited the recent funding of a proposed research program for integrated insect control.

"This program," he said, "will be conducted on six crops, with the total program being administered by the University of California and the research being conducted by personnel from 18 universities and the Federal Government." One of the principal thrusts of the program, he said, will be to define threshold levels of insect populations and then use "that method of control that is most effective and least damaging to the environment".

Tschirley closed on an optimistic note, although he foresees additional problems arising.

"Pesticides," he said, "are needed along with other methods of control and I have no doubt that their use will continue. We can face problems of the future honestly and squarely recognizing that adequate food and fiber are basic requirements for any successful society. Producing adequate food and fiber becomes an evermore difficult task because the population continues to increase and the land area available for cultivation is limited.

"We will have to use the most sophisticated technology available," he added, "to discharge the responsibility we agriculturists have. Agriculture has been successful in the past — it will continue to be so in the future"

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