

Parallel pesticide review

Representatives from the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the European Commission (EC), and Germany have reached agreement to conduct a parallel review of an application to register the corn herbicide foramsulfuron (from Aventis). The parallel review is a pilot project to identify the similarities and differences between EPA's and the EC's data requirements, data evaluations and overall regulatory processes. The project is an outgrowth of the international harmonisation work on pesticides ongoing in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

GM crops

...the first GM crop is granted UK National Listing

ChardonLL is a genetically modified (GM) variety of forage maize that is tolerant to the herbicide glufosinate. It is the first GM crop to have been granted UK National Listing following trials over 2 years. Commercialisation of the maize, or any other GM crop, will not be possible, however, until 2003 after the completion of farm-scale biodiversity trials.

...GMO CARE

GMO CARE is a pan-European 3-year project, funded by the European Commission, seeking to determine the effects of genetic modification on metabolic pathways in plants and to develop means to eliminate potentially hazardous unintended changes in food crops at the earliest stage possible. Peter Bramley and colleagues at Royal Holloway College, University of London, one of 11 laboratories across Europe participating in the project, will be looking at the potential for unintended health effects from transgenic tomatoes, developing a metabolic profiling or cellular mapping technique which will reveal differences between parent, transgenic and mutant crops.

...Brussels postpones approval of genetically modified organisms

The European Commission has again delayed approval of 3 types of transgenic crops (2 rapeseed varieties and 1 variety of fodder beet) because of insufficient information about the exact marketing approval requested. The committee has given the companies seeking approval another 3 months to clarify their documentation. The European directive regarding genetically modified organisms is currently

under review and a moratorium has been observed since June 1999 when several European Union countries expressed their opposition to any more approvals.

...biotechnology information/promotion programme in North America

An information programme sponsored by The Council for Biotechnology Information has been initiated in the US and Canada to tell the public about biotechnology in agriculture. The programme includes a website (<http://www.whybiotech.com/>), information material, and TV and newspaper advertisements. The website features information on the safety of various foods containing genetically modified products plus a site for scientific information on biotechnology contributed by companies and institutes. The Council is a collaborative effort of Aventis, BASF, Dow, DuPont, Monsanto, Novartis, Zeneca, and the Biotechnology Industry Organisation (BIO).

...European Parliament and GM

In April 2000, the European Parliament voted against measures to stop GM pollution, ban foods that contain antibiotic-resistant genes and to make biotech companies liable for any damage caused by GM crops. EuropaBio, which represents biotechnology companies had warned that industry and jobs could be lost if there is support for the proposals, which signal the end of any further development for modern biotechnological applications in Europe. The European Parliament has instead called for more general rules on environmental liability which Brussels will bring forward in 2001.

...Greenpeace greets European Court ruling

Following a ruling by the European Court of Justice (ECJ), Greenpeace is claiming victory in its battle to keep genetically modified (GM) crops off the market in France. The ECJ ruled that France has no right to block the sale of three genetically modified (GM) crop strains after they had been approved at EU level. France submitted the original request for one of the crops (strains of Novartis GM maize) but after approving the crop for France, changed its mind over a matter of irregular scientific evidence and later vetoed its approval at EU level. According to the ECJ this was illegal and Greenpeace initially said this decision was a blow to the Precautionary Principle. But Greenpeace and an anti-GM left-wing farmers union now say

that, on further analysis, the ECJ has not ruled out the possibility of contesting the decision if France can show that irregularities occurred in the approvals process. Greenpeace is sure it will be able to prove there were procedural errors and anticipates that the French courts will maintain the ban on Novartis maize.

UK registration of rodenticides

With effect from 1 April 2000, under the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986 (as amended), responsibility for the registration of rodenticides not solely used for plant protection (*i.e.* because they are classified as biocides) transferred from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) to the Health & Safety Executive (HSE). Despite the fact that responsibility for registration of rodenticides formally passed to HSE on 1 April 2000, it was not practical to transfer any products still being evaluated by MAFF's Pesticide Safety Directorate (PSD); these evaluations will be completed by PSD.

UK pesticide taxes

The British Agrochemicals Association has put together a package of industry alternatives to the idea of a pesticide tax. The focus of the proposals is on measures to reduce any inappropriate or poor use of pesticides. Since the Parliamentary Environmental Audit Committee came out in favour of just such a tax, the BAA still have a lot of persuading to do.

Children's exposure to pesticides

A University of Washington study published in the June issue of Environmental Health Perspectives suggests that pesticides are finding their way into the bodies of pre-school children in agricultural communities at a higher level than previously thought. More than half of the children of farm workers living in Douglas and Chelan counties in Washington state were exposed during the spraying season to levels of pesticides that exceeded federal safety levels. These levels were estimated from concentrations of pesticide breakdown products in urine and compared to reference values established by the US EPA and WHO. 56% of the children had test results that indicated exposure to azinphos-ethyl might have exceeded federal levels and 9% had test results suggesting that federal safety levels for phosmet might have been exceeded. The study concludes that

regulators need to look at exposure standards and determine if they are appropriate.

Food standards

...in the USA

A plan was announced on May 3 by the Clinton administration to provide more oversight of gene-altered crops and to set standards for labelling foods that claim to be free of biotech ingredients. The plan would require biotech companies to notify the Food and Drug Administration at least four months before releasing new genetically engineered crops and provide the agency with their research data. Once the FDA reviews a biotech food, the agency's conclusions and product safety data would be posted on its Web site for consumers to read. The FDA also intends to set standards for labelling biotech-free food, an idea the food industry proposed last year. In addition, the plan calls for Agriculture Department involvement in certifying new scientific tests designed to detect the presence of biotech ingredients in food to ensure that food labelled biotech-free meets uniform standards.

...in the UK

The UK's New Food Standards Agency began operating on 1 April 2000. It has been established to end the climate of confusion and suspicion about the way that food safety and standards issues have been handled. Professor Sir John Krebs, Chairman of the Agency provides his view on the role and operation of the agency in this month's Science & Public Affairs. Regaining public trust in the Government's handling of food safety issues will not be easy after BSE and other mishandled food scares, but Professor Krebs is confident such trust can be earned by the Agency. Three values will be particularly important to the agency, states Professor Krebs.

- putting the consumer first, breaking away from the conflict between support for the food industry and protection of the consumer.
- conducting business in an open and accessible way, bringing people into decision making at an early stage and keeping them involved throughout.
- being an independent voice, using the best impartial expert advice and not being unduly influenced by any particular sector's interests.

The new Agency has authority to publish its advice, has a UK-wide remit after

devolution, covers the entire food production and supply process - 'farm to fork', has responsibilities not only for policy development and advice to health ministers but also in enforcement, labelling, and consumer choice, as well as information and education on food safety, diet and nutrition.

Parathion and birds

The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has invited comment on the ecological effects of parathion. Parathion is highly toxic to birds and has caused numerous wildlife mortality incidents. Bird die-offs have been documented in a wide range of species including waterfowl, shorebirds, raptors and songbirds. Even after extensive efforts to mitigate hazards to humans, parathion continues to raise significant safety concerns for farm workers. According to the US Fish and Wildlife Service, "substantial evidence verifies that mortality of migratory birds and other non-target organisms occurs even when parathion is applied in complete conformance with the label." Birds can be poisoned by ingestion of insects or grain with residues, by preening or bathing, via inhalation of spray particles or dermally through feet or exposed skin (especially of chicks and also brood patches of nesting birds). In 1991, after numerous lethal incidents involving humans, wildlife and domestic animals, EPA restricted use of parathion to nine crops: alfalfa, barley, corn, cotton, canola, sorghum, soybean, sunflower and wheat. Further restrictions attempted to minimise worker exposure by prohibiting hand-harvesting of crops and by delaying entrance into fields for three to six days after spraying. Applications, however, are still made by plane and helicopter. Birds and other wildlife, in addition to being exposed during spraying, cannot be stopped from entering sprayed fields.

The full assessment is available via EPA at http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/op/ethyl_parathion.htm to whom comments can be sent.

See also the American Bird Conservancy website at <http://www.abcbirds.org>.

Trifloxystrobin given UK approval

The new mesostemic strobilurin fungicide trifloxystrobin from Novartis has gained full UK approval. This offers cereal growers improved control of *Septoria* and

Rhynchosporium and larger yield responses. Trifloxystrobin represents the next generation of strobilurin fungicides, strongly attracted to the plant surface where they provide a barrier against disease infection. In fact, it is claimed to penetrate the leaf and move to the opposite untreated surface of the leaf providing protection against infection on both surfaces. In 2000, the active ingredient will be available in the UK under the brand name Twist as 125EC formulation. A formulated mix with cyproconazole is planned for 2001.

Snippets

...the California EPA Department of Pesticide Regulation approved twenty new pesticide active ingredients during 1999. This included three reduced risk compounds: a subspecies of *Bacillus thuringiensis* for use as a bioinsecticide on artichokes and alfalfa; fenhexamid as a fungicide for grapes and strawberries; and pymetrozine as an insecticide for ornamental trees.

...in 1999 there was a 4% growth in sales of pesticides for use in agriculture, fruit cultivation, and gardening in Sweden. There has been a trend towards increased use of pesticides since Sweden entered the European Union. Reasons for the increase include greater acreage of grain crops and different methods of use. Nevertheless, pesticide use in Sweden is still very low relative to Europe as a whole.

...organophosphate (OP) producers are hoping to persuade the UK government to agree to interim steps that will permit OP dips back onto the market before third quarter 2000. Farmers are facing an increasing scab problem and so industry will argue that temporary arrangements should be introduced.

...opposition by the European Union has resulted in the postponement of a plan by the Danish government to prohibit the use of pesticides in private gardens. The move has been welcomed by the Danish crop protection association.

...the California EPA Department of Pesticide Regulation is re-assessing 34 products containing the rodenticide brodifacoum. This follows concern by California's Department of Fish and Game over the effect of the anticoagulant on wildlife. The Department has investigated 58 cases of possible wildlife exposure to anticoagulant rodenticides since 1994.