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Contributed by Tim Alexander
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For Central Illinois Farmers & Rural Dwellers
By Tim Alexander for the News Bulletin

IFCA: Atrazine Proven Safe By Testing

BLOOMINGTON - Agriculture is under attack on local, regional and national levels including a class-action lawsuit recently brought in Illinois against Syngenta, the largest manufacturer of the herbicide atrazine, and other makers of the weed-killing chemical on behalf of water districts across the state.

Syngenta fought back recently by announcing a study of 122 community water systems conducted in conjunction with the U.S. EPA revealed levels of atrazine in drinking water are negligible and pose no risk to infants, children or adults. We spoke with Jean Payne, president of the Illinois Fertilizer & Chemical Association, about the importance of atrazine to farmers.

"Atrazine is very important in controlling grasses from a residual standpoint," said Payne. "Our ability to use atrazine means farmers can practice no-till; it's an application you can make without turning the soil.

Atrazine has been used for (around 50) years and is one of the most-studied products ever. It has been re-registered many times by the EPA, and they've reduced the label rates in the last ten years. We really feel this lawsuit is not really about the product itself, it's more about trial lawyers drumming up business."

If farmers are not able to use atrazine on their crop fields, a worthy substitute would be hard to find and the amount of no-till acreage in the state would decline, Payne said. "Glyphosate can kill grass, too, but it's not a long-term residual product," she said. "Atrazine is an erosion controller because farmers don't use cultivators to uproot grasses."

Hearing Set for Chemical Drift

PEORIA - Newspaper reports of two children allegedly exposed to chemical drift from aerial spraying of pesticides in the district of Illinois Rep. Dan Moffitt (R-Gilson) in 2008 has led to a public hearing that could result in new regulations affecting crop dusting firms and farmers.

The hearing, which will take place September 30 before the Illinois Senate Agriculture Committee in Room 409 of the Capitol Building in Springfield at 10:00 a.m., will allow public input regarding aerial applications and other instances of chemical drift including ground applications.

"Agricultural chemicals are valuable tools that increase crop yield and quality. However, chemical drift can create serious problems for the people and businesses downwind and downstream of farms that use agricultural chemicals. The chemicals present health risks to children, the elderly and people with asthma," Illinois Sen. David Koehler (D-Peoria), who is a member of the Illinois Senate Agriculture Committee, said last week via e-mail.

"They can also damage organic crops and fisheries. The goal of this subject matter hearing is to learn more about chemical drift and to begin working toward a compromise that will protect the livelihoods of farmers and the health and safety of their neighbors."

Representatives from both the Illinois Fertilizer & Chemical Association and the Illinois Agricultural Aviation Association said that a 24-hour notice for neighbors of farmers before spraying begins-- as has been proposed-- is not practical to the industry. Both organizations plan on having a voice at the meeting. The public is encouraged to submit written testimony through the office of Sen. Mike Frerichs (D-Chicago), chair of the Illinois Senate Agriculture Committee (217-782-2507), for consideration during the hearing. Oral testimony from the public will be allowed during the meeting in Springfield as time permits.

Cattlemen: TIME Magazine Ignored Our Input

DENVER, Col. - A spokesman for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) said last week that TIME magazine writer Bryan Walsh ignored expert information provided by the organization and chose not to include quotes from interviews arranged by the NCBA for the magazine's August 31 cover story critical of virtually all aspects of food production and agriculture.

"Bryan Walsh chose to ignore every word from our experts," Williams said during a phone interview.

"I spoke specifically with Walsh during the development of the article, and we at the NCBA really bent over backwards to try to provide him with expert resources and information he could use to provide some balance to what ended up being a very one-sided look at the issues of modern food production. Unfortunately, he chose to ignore every person we had him speak to, except for one short quote."

Following the article's publication, Walsh further angered many in agriculture when he appeared on AgriTalk radio and acknowledged that he had chosen not to include the facts and testimony provided by the NCBA and other ag groups in his story. TIME encourages writers to choose their story angle rather than present balancing viewpoints, Walsh inferred. "My jaw hit the floor as I listened to the interview," said Williams. "(Walsh) unapologetically validated that he chose not to use our information because it did not represent his viewpoint."

Farm Futures: More Corn, Less Beans in '10

DECATUR - Farm Futures senior editor Bryce Knorr said a recent survey of planting intentions reveals that farmers plan to increase corn ground next year and devote less acreage to soybeans. "Corn/soybean price ratios favor

soybeans, but many farmers have been disappointed the last two years by their soybean crops," said Knorr. "Plus, after planting more beans this year, farmers may want to realign their rotations." Knorr discussed the findings at last week's Farm Progress Show.

Illinois Farm Fact:

The Gold Rush apple-- a yellow sweet-tart variety-- is Illinois's official state fruit. (agintheclassroom.org)

(Tim Alexander is a freelance reporter who writes agriculture, news and feature articles for News Bulletin, Farm World and many other publications. He is the recipient of the Illinois Corn Growers Association's (ICGA) 2008 Excellence in Print Media Award.)