

Atrazine Update: EPA panelists review questionable studies on atrazine as rushed review of important herbicide continues



EPA's second Scientific Advisory Panel of the herbicide atrazine ended after several days of discussion in early February.

The panel examined five "ecological" studies about purported effects of atrazine. Some of the panelists were skeptical of these studies, both in their design (lacking control groups with which to compare results), as well as the reliability of their data.

Dr. Jennifer Sass of the National Resources Defense Council articulated the views of the anti-pesticide crowd when she testified that the "economic benefits [of atrazine] are very modest." That assertion surprised many in the room, considering that EPA itself estimates that corn growers stand to lose about \$28 an acre without it.

Another remark Dr. Sass made is still reverberating through the Farm Belt. She questioned "whether or not we need such overproduction of corn in this country . . . that's for EPA to consider."

In fact, EPA has no legal authority to regulate the size of the corn market. But such statements only added to farmers' concerns when they heard that NRDC attorney Nancy Stoner was recently appointed to a high position at EPA as deputy assistant administrator for water. A lot of people are beginning to wonder: Can EPA render unbiased regulations based on science when activists with pre-conceived political agendas are calling the shots?

What will happen if EPA does decide to pull atrazine as part of a plan to regulate the size of the corn market?

Perhaps the best answer came from a farm industry spokesman who testified at the EPA hearing.

"Corn and sorghum are key feedstocks," he testified. "Undermine these sectors, and you've pretty much dealt a blow to the entire U.S. food industry, along with the economic health of the American Farm Belt."

As if to underscore what this might mean for Washington, he added: "[F]arm bureaus from Iowa—to Minnesota—to Indiana—to Illinois—to Florida, are concerned."

EPA has scheduled another atrazine Scientific Advisory Panel in April before the results of the last SAP are required to be issued. If you're concerned about the hastily convened, redundant review of atrazine, support your growers' associations.

