



March 28, 2012

Pesticide fear-mongering is the real pest

As crop growers endeavor to meet the increasing global demand for food, fuel, and livestock feed, a longstanding [debate](#) has intensified: Do the higher levels of herbicides, insecticides, and fertilizers used in agriculture today pose an environmental hazard? Groups ranging from the Union of Concerned Scientists to the Natural Resources Defense Council are lobbying both Congress and the EPA to address these concerns. The NRDC's Gina Solomon, for instance, accused the EPA of "dragging its feet" on tightening pesticide regulations, given their dangers. Yet many of those involved in the production of crops say that current chemical regulation is adequate, and the real concern is making sure there are enough crops for the world's expanding population.

ACSH's Dr. Gilbert Ross wonders whether there actually is any evidence that farmers are using more crop protection chemicals now than they used to. "The alarmist position highlighted in mainstream media coverage seems to aim to scare the public about pesticides. We've seen NRDC do this over and over again — no amount of regulation is sufficient for them."

"Those who are protesting have their priorities confused," adds ACSH's Dr. Elizabeth Whelan. "We have a growing need to increase the global food supply, and we need to be realistic about what's required to do that. There may well be increased use of chemicals if you're aiming for a greater crop yield. But these chemicals are expensive, and growers won't use any more than absolutely necessary. Ironically, these same 'environmental' groups also oppose biotechnology in agriculture, a technology that actually reduces the need for chemical pesticides."

And while those concerned about increased chemicals point to agricultural chemical residues detected in the water and air samples of U.S. farming communities, ACSH's Dr. Josh Bloom points out that mere detection of a substance does not necessarily indicate a problem. "In determining the real risk of a chemical," he says, "both the inherent toxicity and the amount of exposure to the chemical must be considered. There are very few chemicals capable of doing harm at minuscule concentrations."

Indeed, says Dr. Ross. "These groups are talking about hypothetical risks, when the real risk — an inadequate food supply — is already a reality."

For a more comprehensive view of the realities of the chemicals necessary for producing crops, take a look at our recent publication, [Pesticides in Perspective](#).

This information was found online at:

http://www.acsh.org/factsfears/newsID.3498/news_detail.asp