



PESTICIDES:

Farmers press EPA to reject atrazine restrictions

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Farm groups are calling on U.S. EPA to reject any new restrictions on the herbicide atrazine related to the agency's ongoing registration review.

In a flurry of comments, the National Corn Growers Association and farmers said atrazine is a critical tool against weeds that are increasingly building resistance to chemical treatments.

"Without atrazine, farmers would have to use higher quantities of other herbicides that are less effective while increasing tillage and threatening soil health and nutrients," the NCGA said in a document submitted Wednesday, the last day of the comment period for EPA's ecological risk assessment of the chemical.

In its draft assessment released in June, EPA said atrazine was a danger to birds and fish, especially bobwhite quails and mallard ducks exposed over time. The chemical didn't appear to be a threat to bees, the agency said (Greenwire, June 2).

The NCGA attributed EPA's negative findings to "serious scientific errors" and added that the chemical has been the subject of more than 7,000 scientific studies.

Losing atrazine could cost farmers up to \$59 per acre, the association said. EPA has said the cost to farmers would be about \$28 per acre, but even that is more than farmers can afford, the association said.

A Sept. 26 comment letter from Trent Murdock, an agriculture and natural resources agent for the Graves County, Ky., Cooperative Extension Office, echoed the cost concerns.

"While corn prices have fallen since some of the reports were written, the availability of atrazine for use in corn could make the difference in growers making a profit or loss on their crop," Murdock wrote.

EPA had extended the comment period from Aug. 5 to Wednesday to give farmers more time, citing the distractions of summer field work.

After other steps, such as an assessment of human health risks and the convening of the agency's Science Advisory Panel, EPA will announce a decision regarding re-registration, possibly in 2018.

Environmental groups say EPA should ban atrazine, which has been used since 1958, because of risks to wildlife and water quality. The European Union has banned its use. EPA last reapproved it in 2003.

"This ecological risk assessment is EPA's acknowledgement that it screwed up when it re-registered atrazine back in 2003. It turns out Europe was right after all," said Nathan Donley, senior scientist at the Center for Biological Diversity, a nonprofit group opposed to many farm chemicals.

Donley said pesticide makers' position that atrazine can be used safely is a "complete sham," citing Europe's moves against it.