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# Will A Known Neurotoxin Be Used on Florida Citrus?

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Published March 25, 2021 at 11:46 AM EDT

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Citrus greening, one of the most significant citrus diseases, was first detected in Florida in 2005. The disease is now distributed throughout Florida and portions of South Carolina, Louisiana, Georgia, and Puerto Rico. Citrus greening is spread by an insect vector called the Asian Citrus Psyllid (ACP). ACP is widely dispersed in the United States, including Texas, Louisiana,

Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Hawaii, and the Territories of Puerto Rico and Guam, as well as areas of Southern California and Arizona.

## **In the final days of the Trump administration, the Environmental Protection Agency cleared the way for use of the pesticide Aldicarb, a known neurotoxin. Florida citrus growers want to use it to fight citrus greening.**

Nathan Donley is a Senior Scientist at the [Center for Biological Diversity](#). The nonprofit organization is suing the EPA for approving the use of a pesticide called Aldicarb on Florida citrus crops. Aldicarb has already been banned in dozens of countries, and the World Health Organization calls it "[one of the most acutely toxic pesticides in use](#)." Used in the United States for years, the EPA pressured manufacturer Bayer to phase it out back in 2010. The end of the Trump administration brought it back, potentially setting it up to be used on tens of thousands of acres of Florida citrus.

"There are major human health implications here as well as environmental harms. This decision in no way shape or form complies with federal law and so that's why we're bringing EPA to court," says Donley.

While the lawsuit is ongoing, Donley says Florida's citrus industry might start using it if approved by the state Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

"When [EPA was reanalyzing aldicarb](#) they found incredible risks to particularly small children from the use of Aldicarb and the use that caused the highest risk was used on citrus," says Donley.

He said the EPA entered into negotiations with Aldicarb's manufacturer, which at the time was Bayer, and pressured Bayer to phase out their registration of aldicarb. The EPA doesn't ban pesticides, but this was about as close to a ban as you could get in the U.S., according to Donley. Today, the product is manufactured by [Aglogic](#).

"The [EPA knows how harmful this can be to children in it spurred them to take action a decade ago](#)," Donley adds. "The harms to children's health are this is a developmental neurotoxin. Children are more at risk."

Michael Aerts is the Director of Science and Regulatory Affairs for the [Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association](#). He said the industry is under a lot of stress and strain from the impacts of [citrus greening](#). The citrus growing community, he says, looks to Aldicarb as a beneficial weapon in their constant battle against the impacts of citrus greening.

"We just were fostering the link between the regulatory authorities, both in Tallahassee and D.C., and the citrus industry, so that those regulatory authorities could understand the situation with respect to the industry and with respect to greening, with

respect to the what they were looking for, from a, you know, solution standpoint, and to add and how this potentially might be of benefit to the citrus industry overall," said Aerts.

Under the original Aldicarb registration, Aerts said, growers could use as much as 66 pounds of product per acre. Now, he says, that maximum amount is 33 pounds, stressing it is not applied as a spray; rather, the pesticide is buried in the ground, by a trained professional, about 3 or 4 inches beneath the surface of the soil, along the length of the row.

That's part of the stewardship program, said Aerts: Burying the pesticide, a known human neurotoxin, keeps it inaccessible to workers, birds, and mammals, he said. He also said they are only allowed to apply it during the dry season, from Nov. 1 through April 30.

"Then it can get utilized and taken up by the tree and then by the time summer comes and rains start. Well, that threat of transferring the aldicarb to potential groundwater sources is eliminated or exponentially reduced," adds Aerts.

Aldicarb is a systemic pesticide, which means that it's absorbed through the plant's roots and makes its way all throughout the plant. That includes the fruit as well, said Donley. It's also why it's not used in bananas, [because of its high potential for exposure to children who eat them](#). It's also been found in [well water](#).

"Unfortunately, there's not a lot of things that Floridians can do if they live near the citrus fields because they've got to drink water. So that's why I believe this legal case is so important. A decade ago, EPA said, 'This is too harmful to us in our country.' And now they're saying, 'We're going to use 2.5 million pounds of it across an entire state.' I mean, it's banned in more than 100 countries. It's regulated under the [Rotterdam Convention](#), which is a huge international treaty that unfortunately, the U.S. is not part of," said Donley.

Aerts stresses the industry's stewardship program.

"All the i's are dotted and t's have been crossed with respect to being able to get the benefits from the product while simultaneously maintaining the human health and environmental safety that's required from this and any other active ingredient that might be a part of this type of process," said Aerts.

Danny Blank is an owner and grower at the organic 12 seasons farm in Fort Myers, where he grows organic oranges. He does not use chemicals to control citrus greening. Rather, he uses healthy soil, or what is increasingly called regenerative agriculture.

"We have gorgeous looking honeybell trees and gorgeous tangerines and grapefruits, which is a really susceptible group of citrus, is also turning around in a very positive way. It's a combination of many things," said Blank. "But ultimately, as a farmer, I want it to be less dependent on me and more dependent on the host of what I call 'the



orchestra of life in the soil' where we have like the wind section and the percussion section, and they're all doing their part together to make a more healthy, vibrant, beautiful life in the soil that we want to create," said Blank.

Aldicarb is currently being reviewed for approval by the Pesticide Registration Evaluation Committee, or PREC, of the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. PREC [had a meeting on March 4 about aldicarb along with other pesticides](#). Franco Ripple, Communications Director of Florida's [Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services](#), says that no determination was made at that time.

"It's my understanding that at that meeting, the several agencies that form the PREC, the Scientific Review Committee, specifically the Department of Health, the Department of Environmental Protection, and our department, the Department of Agriculture, had additional questions about that product that still needed to be answered," said Ripple. "And so you know, no determination was made at that meeting."

Donley says that for now, consumers may want to buy organic.