

A farmer's view of 'dangerous chemicals'

Guest Commentary

By KIP TOM

A RECENT Reuters story titled "Farm group seeks U.S. halt on 'dangerous' crop chemicals" heralded the efforts of the Indiana-based Save our Crops Coalition to oppose the use of herbicides containing dicamba and 2,4-D. This group is using the regulatory processes at U.S. EPA and USDA to block the much-needed weed-control innovations of Dow AgroSciences, Monsanto and BASF from coming to market.

These new weed-control systems consist of stacked herbicide-tolerant traits for corn, soybeans and cotton and improved low-volatility formulations of dicamba and 2,4-D herbicide designed to address the very concerns of this coalition. Both systems promise highly effective control of broadleaf weeds — especially notorious weeds like pigweed, waterhemp, marestail and ragweed that resist glyphosate and other herbicides. Most farmers I know want these tools today and are confident they can manage them.

At a glance, you might think this is another attack on U.S. agriculture by outside interests. In fact, it's an effort by people within agriculture who should know better. There are a lot of big claims about the coalition's membership, but the heart of the matter is coexistence of Indiana-based tomato growers and their neighbors. At issue is the fact that dicamba and 2,4-D herbicides can really hurt tomatoes if applied carelessly.

As an Indiana farmer who has raised tomatoes as well as row crops, I've taken a careful look at what is happening here. It's important others in agriculture are aware of a few things left out of the Reuters story:

- Millions of consumers and farmers have successfully and safely used products containing 2,4-D and dicamba over the last several decades. EPA confirms their human and environmental safety. In fact, the new herbicide-tolerant crop systems will provide newer, better formulations than the products nearly every consumer with a lawn has on a shelf in the garage.
- A science-based discussion reveals



WHOLE STORY: Kip Tom wants farmers and consumers to know there is another viewpoint besides that expressed in a Reuters story on farm chemicals.

that dicamba and 2,4-D are safe when used appropriately. EPA has reviewed and re-reviewed the data to confirm this. Hence the unfettered access to these products for all consumers. I can tell you that several specialty-crop chemicals are much more dangerous if misused, and regulators don't allow unlicensed consumers to use them. The lobbyist quoted by Reuters as saying dicamba and 2,4-D "are the most dangerous chemicals out there" is not only wrong, he's embarked on a slippery slope for specialty-crop growers.

- As it relates to drift, let me just say I've had that experience. It's a serious thing all of us manage on both sides of the fence. Application equipment, labels and formulations, licensing and training have greatly reduced drift risk over the last few years. The new herbicide-tolerant crop systems opposed by this coalition are designed around new sprayer technology, formulations and application practices for the

express purpose of protecting sensitive crops from drift.

- Experts recommend 2,4-D and dicamba applications as part of sustainable, integrated weed management. To attack these products is to attack the leading recommendations of university weed scientists across the country. These products are widely used in corn, pasture and rangeland, right-of-ways, golf courses, and yards. Soybean and cotton farmers use these products in preplant and fall burndown applications. Much of the specialty-crop ground in the Midwest is rotated with row crops for agronomic benefits, including the ability to use herbicide-tolerant weed control systems. Despite the claims of those who pitched this story to the media, the new technology in question holds a very real benefit for specialty-crop farmers.

- Using our science-based regulatory system to promote political and PR strategies and dictate market outcomes is not

only divisive, but it is also risky business for U.S. agriculture. Brazilian farmers already enjoy much more rapid regulatory timelines and the stage is set for them to get technologies before U.S. farmers. If the coalition opposed to new herbicide-resistant crops gets its way, this trend will continue.

Finally, we need to engage constructively and focus on solutions. If every past grievance or mishap between neighbors becomes the basis for more federal regulation of innocent parties who need more options to help them farm, it will be a race to the bottom. U.S. farmers need new weed-control solutions sooner rather than later. We need companies to invest and regulators to focus on the science without undue interference. We need to build solutions on the basis of common ground and mutual success regardless of what crops we raise and how we raise them.

Tom farms near Syracuse.

Experience **SALFORD**
SAVINGS



Our Fall tillage early order program is in full swing!

To find out how much you can save on the purchase of new equipment, contact a participating SALFORD dealer today for details.

SALFORD

www.salfordmachine.com

Osceola, Iowa • Ontario, Canada • 1-866-442-1293