NEWS RELEASE

California Environmental Protection Agency
Department of Pesticide Regulation

California Department of Food and Agriculture

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COMMITTEE FORMED TO HELP REDUCE RELIANCE ON AGRICULTURAL CHEMICALS

SACRAMENTO -- Cal/EPA's Department of Pesticide Regulation and the California Department of Food and Agriculture today announced the formation of a committee that will help find alternative crop protection strategies which can reduce the environmental problems associated with pesticide use.

"In forming this committee, we recognize that the future of crop protection is being driven in part by the public's strong desire to reduce risks associated with pesticide exposure," said DPR Director James W. Wells. "The private sector and government agencies like DPR and CDFA must join together for a broad-based, systematic approach toward the use of less disruptive pest management methods. This kind of cooperation is absolutely essential in coming to terms with an environment in which farmers have fewer chemical tools, and must reduce their dependence on agricultural pesticides."

"Pesticides continue to be important tools for agricultural production," said CDFA Chief Deputy Director Robert L. Shuler, who will co-chair the committee with Wells. "However, environmentally sound pest management is necessary to reduce exposure to pesticide residues while, at the same time, cope with an ever-declining number of chemicals."

"Marketplace factors, along with the passage of new state and federal laws, have resulted in reducing the number of pesticides available to agriculture," Shuler said. At the same time, use of pesticides, applied only if and when a pest problem requires chemical intervention, is often key to the success of integrated pest management (IPM) strategies, even though IPM emphasizes non-chemical alternatives.

IPM is a long-term strategy for pest control that uses all available techniques, including cultural and mechanical controls, pest-resistant plants, release of beneficial organisms, and the judicious use of pesticides. The goal of IPM is to reduce the impact of farming practices on the environment.

"While widespread adherence to the principles of IPM will have the desirable effect of reducing the overall load of pesticides in the environment, success at promoting this kind of environmentally sound pest management depends in part on having a variety of pesticides available," said Wells.

"The committee will help us identify pesticides critical to the success of IPM programs. Their advice will help us determine whether or not feasible alternatives exist for a chemical," Wells said.

The committee will also assist DPR in conducting a review of research being done around the world into alternative pest management practices.

"The search for innovative solutions to pest management problems is going on around the world," said Wells. "With their diverse background and expertise, the committee members can be invaluable in helping us to find new developments in pest management that may have gone unnoticed here," Wells said.

The idea will be to encourage the development, testing and dissemination of new pest management practices, with particular emphasis on the importance of alternatives to the pesticide uses critical to IPM, said Wells.

The committee will also help identify obstacles to this process in California's regulatory system or in the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Wells said. "They will help determine whether state and federal registration standards unnecessarily impede the registration of pesticides that could replace those being lost, or of new chemicals which may fit into more environmentally benign crop protection strategies."

To help identify minor crop uses facing elimination, a minor crop task force will be formed as an adjunct to the committee. Minor crops are commodities with relatively limited nationwide acreage, considered to have limited market potential for pesticide sales. Due to increasing costs of data development and escalating registration fees, many manufacturers are withdrawing pesticides with minor crop uses from the market.

"For California, the term `minor crop' is a misnomer," said Shuler. "Minor crops include

virtually all fruit, nut and vegetable commodities. In 1990, 14 of the 15 highest value crops grown in California were minor use crops, representing $8.4 billion a year in value at harvest."

The minor use task force will be comprised of representatives of many California commodity groups. Their task will be to evaluate information available through DPR and elsewhere on what minor crop uses in California need to be addressed at the state and federal level.

"The task force will also help us in our continuing dialogue with federal authorities working on the minor crop issue, to ensure that California agriculture speaks with a single voice, presenting a unified perspective on what is important to the continued success of agriculture in this state," said Shuler.

Members will include representatives of all aspects of production agriculture, from those who practice traditional chemical-based crop protection techniques to organic farmers. It also includes members of the academic community, government regulators, and environmental groups active in the pesticide arena. *(For members, see below.)*

The first meeting of the Pest Management Advisory Committee is tentatively scheduled at 10 a.m., June 26. The first meeting of the Minor Use Task Force is tentatively scheduled at 10 a.m. July 8. Both meetings will be in Room 102 at 1220 N Street, Sacramento. They are open to the public.

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Membership, Pest Management Advisory Committee: Peter Cooey, consultant, Assembly Committee on Agriculture; Kim Crumm, California Agricultural Production Consultants Association; Jennifer Curtis, Natural Resources Defense Council; Bob Ehn, Western Agricultural Chemicals Association; Jasper Hempel, Western Growers Association; Jerry Howard, California County Agricultural Commissioners Association; Bill Liebhardt, University of California Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program; Jim Lyons, UC Center for Pest Management Research; Pat Marrone, California Industrial Biotechnology Association; Richard Matoian, Grape and Tree Fruit League; Jack Pandol, agricultural producer; Synthya Penn, Association of Natural Biocontrol Producers; Pat Weddle, National Alliance of Independent Crop Consultants; and representatives of California State University; UC Commodity Committee; U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; California Certified Organic Farmers; California Farm Bureau Federation; California Action Network; and California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation.