NEWS RELEASE

California Environmental Protection Agency

Department of Pesticide Regulation

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DPR DIRECTOR PRAISES UC REPORT ON MOVING `*BEYOND PESTICIDES'*

SACRAMENTO -- A report released this week by the University of California sets forth a much-needed game plan to accelerate the development of biological approaches to pest management in California, said James W. Wells, director of Cal/EPA's Department of Pesticide Regulation.

In commenting on the UC study, "Beyond Pesticides," Wells said, "Our concerns over the possible environmental and health effects of pesticides have intensified over the past several years. Unfortunately, alternatives to pesticides have not been developed at the same pace."

DPR recently initiated discussions with UC about "how we can work together to facilitate the development of microbial pesticides," said Wells. "We want to make sure that we do all we can to help UC in its research efforts, to minimize registration problems for the products it develops."

DPR has also established a Pest Management Advisory Committee, in conjunction with the Department of Food and Agriculture. The committee includes conventional and organic farmers, regulators, environmental groups, industry members, and representatives from UC's Center for Pest Management Research and its Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program.

"Among other tasks, the committee will help identify alternative crop protection strategies, both to cope with the loss of traditional, chemical-dependent systems and to reduce the potential environmental burden associated with pesticide use," Wells said.

The committee will also assist DPR in conducting a review of research being done around the world into alternative pest management practices. "We, like UC, recognize the need to encourage the development, testing and dissemination of new pest management practices, with particular emphasis on alternatives to pesticide uses critical to integrated pest management (IPM)," said Wells.

A farmer who adopts IPM strategies usually uses pesticides, but in a judicious, targeted approach, combined with careful monitoring of pest damage, and cultural, biological and mechanical controls.

The UC report also called on government to remove obstacles to registration of biologically-based pest control methods (known as "biorationals").

"The UC team is correct in saying that state and federal registration standards sometimes impose impossibly high hurdles to manufacturers of these products," said Wells. Biorational products are often target-specific to a small number of pests and crops, limiting potential sales and making it difficult for manufacturers to justify the costs of registration and required testing, which can run into millions of dollars.

"This is a difficult problem," said Wells. "On the one hand, we want to move quickly to encourage the registration of reduced-risk pesticides. At the same time, we have a mandate to protect human health and the environment, and it is difficult to determine product safety without running many of the toxicology tests. These tests make registering new chemicals expensive."

Nonetheless, there are undoubtedly bureaucratic obstacles to registration of biorationals that can be removed. "I've asked DPR's new pest management committee to help us find them," said Wells.

The Department has also retained a nationally known policy analyst, Dr. Charles Benbrook, to review its pesticide registration program. "Among other things, Dr. Benbrook is helping us determine how we can move toward registration and use of safer and more environmentally benign pest control systems," Wells said. Dr. Benbrook's report is due later this year.

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