

# Public Policy Update

## Value of the USDA Chemical Usage Surveys

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The APS Public Policy Board (PPB) learned in late 2007 that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) had made plans to discontinue the Agricultural Chemicals Usage Surveys (Usage Surveys) conducted by the National Agricultural Statistics Survey (NASS). NASS has stated that it needs \$8.4 million in funding to conduct this survey program.

NASS has conducted and released surveys of agricultural chemical use by U.S. farmers since 1990. These surveys produce estimates of the use of individual pesticide active ingredients by crop and state. All the major fruit, vegetable, and field crops are covered as are all the major producing states. A key variable in the survey reports is an estimate of the percent acres treated with the active ingredient by state. The NASS usage estimates are regularly employed by all the groups involved in the pesticide regulatory process, including commodity organizations, agrichemical companies, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and USDA. The NASS data are freely available on the Internet and are easy to check for an answer concerning the use pattern of any active ingredient/crop combination that is of regulatory interest. Also, postharvest use statistics are published to provide data to develop a chemical use database on pesticides and other chemicals applied to commodities after harvest obtained from storage facilities, processor, and packers and shippers. These data are used as an integral part of assessing risk from use and in regulatory decision making.

Essential pest management practices data are provided by the survey for analyzing policy and program consequences for producers and consumers. Since 1997, integrated pest management (IPM) information has been collected to measure the use of pesticides and pest management practices of all farms and all phases of production agriculture. Additionally, a major use of NASS data over the past several years has been to evaluate the impacts of biotech crops on pesticide use amounts. NASS data provides for comprehensive analyses of farm practices made possible by measures of strategies used by growers as alternatives to chemical use.

The Usage Surveys are relied upon by the USDA Office of Pest Management Policy and the EPA to conduct risk assessments and establish pesticide policy decisions. EPA relies on the NASS data to comply with the Food Quality Protection Act and continues to have need of such data to make required decisions on the required Registration Review of pesticides. Typically, individual active ingredients are used on a fraction of the crop acres grown. The NASS survey provides data on actual usage patterns. Without NASS data, the EPA is likely to default to 100% crop treated in future risk assessments, which could result in the loss of crop protection tools for U.S. farmers.

Other users of the NASS Usage Surveys include the Agricultural Marketing Service, which establishes priority chemicals and crops for the USDA Pesticide Data Program (PDP), and the Economic Research Service, which provides economic analyses of agricultural production sector issues, such as soybean rust.

Without the Agricultural Chemical Usage Surveys, needed data on pest management practices and chemical use, including types and amounts of chemicals applied on crops, livestock, and farmland by producers, and associated economic information to evaluate related economic importance will be lost. Agricultural chemical usage statistics are required to enable informed decisions using sound science in risk analyses. APS recommends that USDA reevaluate the importance of the Usage Surveys and cautions that the interests of agriculture will not be met by discontinuing the vital program, which provides accurate, timely pesticide and fertilizer use information. We urge you to let your congressional members know how important this program is to U.S. agriculture. To help assess member involvement on this issue, please notify APS with an e-mail to

**Michelle Bjerkness** ([mbjerkness@scisoc.org](mailto:mbjerkness@scisoc.org)) with a copy of the message you sent, along with a list of who in Congress you contacted. ■

