

## **Alarm Bells Ringing Over EPA's Atrazine Investigation Apr. 28, 2010**

*By Mike Barnett, publications director, Texas Farm Bureau*

I just returned from a vacation in Mexico and enjoyed every minute of the sun and sand and saltwater. What I didn't enjoy on my visit with our southern neighbor was the worry over drinking water. I also worried about the safety of the food. Tourista is something I prefer to leave to others who are less careful.

Spending a week in Mexico made me appreciate our environmental watchdogs like the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Strict science-based standards ensure I'm not going to get sick drinking tap water most anywhere in the U.S. Similar scientific standards by EPA and other federal agencies — coupled with a responsible farming community — assure that I'm not going to eat food with high pesticide residues or laden with dangerous pathogens. And despite the bad press, incidents involving the safety of our food in the U.S. are rare. In Mexico, I had no assurances.

It may be considered heresy but I'm giving EPA a glowing endorsement. Its job is to keep our environment and American citizens safe. By and large EPA accomplishes its goals. And agriculture's grumbling and moaning and griping and complaining about overregulation and overzealous bureaucrats and an agency out of control in years past has generally held the agency in check. It has led to a middle ground that encourages safe food and water and allows farmers and ranchers to make a living while providing it.

Only now the apple cart is being upset. I'm thinking of a number of recent incidents but the one I'm going to focus on is EPA's request for Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) Scientific Advisory Panel meetings to review the science on the herbicide atrazine.

For those with a non-farm background, atrazine is valued as an environmentally safe herbicide. By employing conservation tillage practices, farmers use atrazine to control weeds, limit soil runoff and reduce the number of tractor trips across their fields. That has led to less soil erosion, improved water quality and fewer greenhouse emissions. Atrazine is used on many corn, sorghum and sugarcane acres.

Health authorities from the U.S., the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and the World Health Organization have repeatedly said atrazine is safe. Yet the herbicide is a fresh target for class-action lawsuits which have emerged in conjunction with a slick, well-funded campaign by activists such as the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC). The goal is to convince EPA regulators that the federal limit on atrazine in water — three parts per billion — is too high.

There is concern that this new review signals an all-out war on U.S. agriculture by environmental activists. Why else would they target a herbicide which has been determined safe in over 6,000 studies and more than a decade of scientific scrutiny?

It's sad commentary that EPA is following activist direction by requesting the Scientific Advisory Panel meetings. If these anti-pesticide groups can plant the seed of fear in this regulatory agency and turn opinion against a safe and beneficial herbicide, then it's open season on farmers and ranchers. If successful with atrazine, other safe pesticides and modern farming practices will be the next target, with frightening consequences for both farmers and consumers.

EPA needs to stick to science and facts, not activist pressure in determining standards for how our food is grown. Replace science with alarm in the regulatory equation and our safe, affordable and abundant food supply takes a different turn.

Goodbye quality assurance, hello food insecurity. In other words, welcome to Mexico.