EPA is working 'feverishly' on new label for over-the-top dicamba for soybeans and cotton

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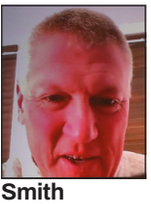
INDIAN WELLS, Calif. — The Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Pesticide Programs registration division is working "feverishly" on new labels for over-the-top application of dicamba on soybeans and cotton, an EPA official says.

Charles "Billy" Smith, director of the registration division at the EPA Office of Pesticide Programs, appeared via Zoom during the American Sugarbeet Growers Association's annual meeting on Tuesday, Jan. 27.


Smith

Among a litany of topics, Smith updated growers on what's happening with dicamba.

A Feb. 6, 2024, ruling by the United States District Court for the District of Arizona vacated the 2020 registrations for XtendiMax, Enginia and Tavium herbicides. An existing stocks order allowed product already purchased to be used in the 2024 growing season, but dicamba could not be used during the 2025 growing season.

In July 2025, the EPA announced a proposed registration decision on XtendiMax, Enginia and Tavia after it had conducted a robust human health risk assessment for the three over-the-top dicamba products and had not identified human health or dietary risks of concern. The industry also proposed several measures to protect against ecological risks found in the EPA's assessment. Smith explained those include things like requiring the use of volatility reducing agents or buffering agents, eliminating previous crop growth stages and calendar-based cutoff dates and prohibiting applications above 95 degrees.

Smith said the agency received more than 50,000 comments on the proposed registration — which he called a "really, really high number" — of which maybe 1,200 were substantial comments for consideration.

Smith acknowledged that while his office is working hard and the issue is "being briefed at the highest levels" of the agency, there is no timeline for a new label to allow over-the-top use of dicamba products. He said it's already unlikely that the southernmost parts of the U.S. will have access to dicamba for the 2026 growing season, but there remains hope for a new label in time for places farther north to use the products.

Dicamba in sugarbeets

While companies are working to develop formulas for over-the-top use of dicamba in sugarbeets, Smith said nothing is in front of the EPA yet.

Were such an application to be submitted, Smith estimated that a worst-case scenario would have a product on the market within 17 months from application. Much would depend, he said, on what areas would use the product that don't already use over-the-top dicamba on either soybeans or cotton. New areas would have to be evaluated for potential endangered species implications, he said.

A look at the future

While Smith talked largely about regulatory and labeling work underway at EPA, another speaker addressed what could be coming in the future.

Dr. Todd Gaines, a researcher and assistant professor at the Department of Agricultural Biology at Colorado State University, told the crowd more and more weeds are gaining resistance to existing herbicides. In studies conducted in conjunction with Western Sugar Cooperative, researchers have found broad resistance to glyphosate in kochia and palmer amaranth and growing resistance to dicamba. Glufosinate has had fewer resistance issues in the area surveyed in Nebraska, Colorado and Wyoming, but resistance has been identified to glufosinate in other regions, too, he said.

That leads to the question of why more herbicides are not being developed. Gaines said glyphosate worked well for so long that it lessened motivation for companies to develop new chemistries. Plus, developing new chemistries is lengthy, expensive work that once completed would lead to lengthy regulatory battles.

Gaines, however, sees the future of fighting weeds pointing more to a new tool: gene silencing. He walked through how technology exists to turn off the genes that lead to herbicide resistance, allowing RNA in plants to be targeted rather than proteins.

Gaines explained the work of Greenlight Biosciences and others in developing products using gene silencing, and he anticipates that once some hurdles are covered — including how to best spray on a product that would silence genes in weeds and thus allow existing herbicides to work on them — new products could be on the market within years. He anticipates regulatory burdens on such developments would be much lighter than those on new herbicides.