



Opinion: Why it's time to fund EPA

Chris Novak (</authors/377-chris-novak>)

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It's always funny to see the reaction on someone's face when you declare your support for funding an agency that regulates your industry. It usually results in a pause, a thoughtful look and ends with a variety of questions about my reasoning. As the CEO of the trade association representing the pesticide industry, I've been having these conversations a lot since I came to CropLife America. We need a strong and effective regulatory system to maintain public trust in our products. The truth is, however, that after more than a decade of inadequate funding, the EPA (more specifically the Office of Pesticide Programs (OPP)) continues to struggle to maintain staff, meet statutory deadlines for the review of pesticides, and complete required consultations under the Endangered Species Act. This is an urgent need that must be addressed.

Recently, EPA leadership commented publicly on these challenges noting, "...[OPP has] experienced declining resources for many years" and in particular has "been losing staff, particularly seasoned and experienced staff, over the past 15 years." The EPA is responsible for reviewing all pesticides—whether it is a product on your dog's flea collar, a sanitizing product under your kitchen sink, or a chemical farmers use to control weeds and insects. When COVID struck, the EPA did need to reprioritize resources to review the many cleaning products designed to combat COVID. We are grateful for the EPA's fast-action on these products, but more products to review with fewer people is not a long-term recipe for success.

Although we may not agree with every decision that comes out of the EPA, we do agree that the better funded the agency is, the more likely it is to provide consumers, farmers and public health officials the tools they need to keep our families safe, grow our food, and protect our communities. This lack of funding is not a new issue. In fact, more than twenty years ago, this short fall resulted in our industry stepping up to secure passage of the Pesticide Registration Improvement Act (PRIA). PRIA created a fee for service program that today provides EPA more than \$50 million in user fees annually to support the staff needed for the pesticide review process. The program is an example of a public-private partnership that works, but more help is needed.

Congress has continued to support PRIA since its initial inception in 2004, but unfortunately, inadequate Congressional funding has undermined the agency's ability to meet its statutory obligations. With stagnant funding since 2012, EPA has fallen further behind and been unable to backfill badly needed positions, including toxicologists, epidemiologists and chemists. These career scientists are essential to EPA's ability to manage a science- and risk-based regulatory system that serves Americans day in and day out, regardless of which political party is in power.

Although this is not the first time we have spoken out about the importance of funding EPA, the current fiscal situation has become untenable. Instead of taking two years to review a new pesticide, the agency is now taking up to four years. These delays don't improve environmental protection—but rather weaken the agency's ability to review new scientific information and develop reasonable solutions that serve the interest of stakeholders, public health, and the environment. It is time to take a serious look at the needs of the agency and provide additional federal funding that can alleviate the regulatory bottlenecks and allow the Agency to rebuild its staff. President Biden's proposed budget for FY2023 calls for an increase of \$10 million to address these issues, but we are advocating for an increase of \$34 M to support PRIA-related activities. Whether you are a consumer, a farmer, a pesticide company executive, or an environmental activist—you want, need, and expect our nation's regulatory system to work. For our system to work effectively, however, it is time we invest the resources needed to get the job done right.

Chris Novak, CropLife America president and CEO

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