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Angela Logomasini | Huffington Post | August 21, 2017





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"Don't let the bed bugs bite" was once nothing more than a lighthearted expression, yet nowadays it's a real concern. Banning the most effective controls will do that. The same can be said for fruit and vegetable pests. It seems such pests are having a field day thanks in part to misguided pesticide regulation driven by junk science and anti-chemical fearmongering.

And that is not just a problem for farmers trying to make ends meet. You might feel a bite in your budget, too, as agricultural pests are an increasing problem, impacting the prices for basic dietary staples like orange juice and many other fruits and vegetables.

It's time to step back and consider why we use these products in the first place.

Farmers need them to fight off a range of pests that would otherwise destroy a large percentage of the world's food supply. Vector control officials need them to fight disease-carrying mosquitos. And consumers need products to battle home pests such as bedbugs and cockroaches that carry diseases and allergens.

These important public health benefits are too often left out of debates about pesticide policy. Instead, the focus is on tiny, largely theoretical and unproven risks associated with the products. This lopsided approach is producing bans and regulations that leave few options for farmers and others who benefit from careful pesticide use.

The latest example is the ongoing debate about chlorpyrifos, a common pesticide that U.S. farmers have safely used for decades. Activists with the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and the Pesticide Action Network of North America (PANNA) petitioned the agency to ban it in 2007 without regard to the impacts or scientific justification.

The EPA has conducted several decade-long, exhaustive scientific

reviews demonstrating that the chemical poses little risk when used according to legal guidelines. And in 2009, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) launched a scheduled safety review of the chemical and indicated it would answer the petition as part of that review.

tandem with other activist groups, they mounted a media campaign to hype risks and build political pressure for a ban. They also took their battle to court, suing EPA multiple times to force a premature decision.

But NRDC and PANNA did not want to wait for the science. Working in

Under political pressure and court-ordered deadlines, EPA proposed banning the chemical at the end of 2015. But the agency explained in the Federal Register that the proposal was driven by a courtimposed deadline, admitting that it did not have science to support a ban.

In March 2016, EPA suddenly called a meeting of its Science Advisory Panel (SAP) to review an entirely new and controversial approach for its chlorpyrifos risk assessment in an attempt to justify its proposed ban. Agency officials asked the SAP to comment on EPA's plan to rely on a single statistical analysis that suggested a link between chlorpyrifos and developmental effects in children, yet such associations alone do not prove cause and effect.

At the meeting, members of the SAP raised numerous concerns about the study; the final SAP report concluded that reliance on this study for regulatory purposes was "premature and possibly inappropriate." They explained that the study data was highly flawed, the effects alleged lacked biological plausibility, and its methodologies were questionable.

Nonetheless, the Obama EPA released a revised risk assessment at the end of November 2016. It used the faulty study to claim its proposed ban was justified. But the final decision was left to the newly elected Trump administration.

In March 2017, EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt rightly rejected the petition, allowing the EPA to continue its more thorough safety review. His decision was judicious, but news headlines and environmental activists have dubbed it an assault on science. Few media stories focused on what's at stake and why Pruitt's decision was, in fact, wise.

Consider the importance of this crop protection product for the orange industry. The national orange crop has already shrunk in recent years because of a bacterial disease transmitted by an insect known as the Asian citrus psyllid, which was accidentally introduced into the United States from Asia. Discovered in 2005, these insects transmit a bacterium that causes a disease known as huanglongbing (HLB), which prevents proper ripening of fruit.

Referred to as "citrus greening," HLB has taken a heavy toll on citrus crops, particularly in Florida. According to Florida Agriculture Commissioner Adam Putnam, the disease has reduced orange production by 70 percent compared to 20 years ago. "Our brightest minds are working to find a solution, but until then, we must support our growers and provide them every tool available to combat this devastating disease," he told reporters.

Research has shown that a one-time winter application of chlorpyrifos helps reduce overwintering populations of the Asian citrus psyllid "for up to 6-7 months" while maintaining populations of other insects that feed on the citrus psyllid. Without access to chlorpyrifos, the Asian citrus psyllid may soon become a major problem in California as well because there are few alternative products.

These problems are just the tip of the iceberg, as multiple comments to EPA related to its risk assessment reveal serious impacts for a wide range of crops. Commenters also addressed adverse impacts for alfalfa, almonds, corn, peanuts, cotton, soybeans, wheat, cranberries, and other products.

Such risk benefit considerations, unfortunately, are not part of the equation for many politicians. In response to Pruitt's decision, Senator Ben Cardin (D-Md.) and six other Democratic Senators recently proposed the "Protect Children, Farmers and Farmworkers" from Nerve Agent Pesticides Act of 2017" (S. 1624). It would do legislatively what activists could not achieve administratively: ban chlorpyrifos before EPA can finish its scientific review.

Such blind overreactions may gain political points for lawmakers who puff themselves up claiming to be guardians of public health. But it's all just a charade. Their policies would harm public health by raising prices and thereby reducing consumption of many healthy

fruits and veggies. **Related Stories**

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