

Defining and Managing Invasives in an Ecological Context

This year's 36th National Pesticides Forum, *Organic Neighborhoods: For healthy children, families, and ecology*, reaffirms the value of bringing people together to share the latest science, policies, and practices to protect our communities from toxic pesticide use. We take a positive approach in showcasing the opportunities to adopt organic practices that eliminate the need for toxic chemicals. Change is emanating from communities and businesses across the country because federal and, too often, state governments are not functioning as they should for the common good.

Pesticide Use in the Name of Invasives

There are many factors that drive pesticide use and pesticide dependency. One that stands out is the stated need to kill, control, or manage invasive species. This issue of *Pesticides and You* explores an ecological approach to the management of unwanted species in the context of biological systems that are integral to sustaining life.

While the most common definition of invasive includes the term "non-native" accompanied by concepts of harm to the environment, natural habitat, human health, and the economy, the "invasives" are not typically defined in the context of intact or healthy ecosystems. So, a non-native species emerges on the landscape, is aggressive because it is filling a niche (an area that is stressed or vulnerable to infestation), and it begins to take over.

The scenario is common and viewed as justification for pesticide use that would otherwise be deemed unacceptable by public health and environmental standards. Therefore, we see the fever pitched response to invasives at the federal level with the issuance of Executive Order 13112 in February, 1999—requiring executive departments and agencies "to take steps to prevent the introduction and spread of invasive species, and to support efforts to eradicate and control invasive species that are established" under the direction of the National Invasive Species Council. The Council was set up to oversee implementation of the order and encourage proactive planning and action to "improve the Federal response to invasive species." Under the federal *Plant Protection Act*, USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is authorized to "take both emergency and extraordinary emergency actions to address incursions of noxious [invasive] weeds." This has translated to heavy pesticide use.

The list of invasive species is very long. It can be found on the USDA National Invasive Species Information Center's webpage. Species from these lists have been incorporated into state laws requiring landowners to take action to control them. Local governments often exempt invasives

from ordinances restricting pesticides in parks and on playing fields. Government funds are available for weed management entities to carry out eradication efforts. In this issue, we discuss an approach to invasives, starting with a clear definition of the problem, evaluation of the conditions that give rise to the problem, and a strategy to address the underlying causes.

Court Stops CA Invasive Spray Program

We write about a landmark court decision in California, which recently found that the state has not performed adequate reviews of pesticides used to kill invasives under the *California Environmental Quality Act* (CEQA). The court shut down the aggressive spray program in the state until it conducts adequate reviews of the health impacts and possible alternative strategies. We include our factsheet on the most widely used herbicide, Monsanto's Roundup (glyphosate), in the campaign to kill invasives because of the danger it poses.

Real Organic

As the adverse effects of pesticides mount and organic alternatives take hold, USDA and members of Congress are attacking organic and the underlying standards that have supported exponential growth of organic agricultural production. The governing principles and values integral to the federal *Organic Foods Production Act* are in need of protection. It is critical that the farmer and consumer base that has driven organic vociferously protects the foundation of organic integrity. To that end, we have joined the standards board of The Real Organic Project, a collaboration that brings together the organic community to define those standards that are not being upheld by USDA, but are adopted by farmers who will display an add-on label on their certified organic products. This real organic label, which will roll out over the next year, will enable consumers to identify those products that truly meet the standards of the organic law, such as growing food in biologically active regenerative soil as opposed to a hydroponic water solution. Through this process, consumers and farmers together are embracing organic as it is intended to be by law, advancing organic market growth.

There is reason for optimism when groups of dedicated people join together to protect health and the environment. This is happening in communities nationwide and will continue in the marketplace, as people define the standards and practices that protect life.

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