The Food Quality Protection Act (FQPA)

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The Food Quality and Protection Act was signed into law by President Clinton in 1996. The major goal of the act is to protect consumers (mainly infants and children) from harmful pesticide exposure through food products. Implementation decisions being made by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will affect agricultural industries greatly. It is important to be informed on the issues surrounding the FQPA and to understand the ramifications of this revolutionary piece of legislation.

The EPA has set a goal of implementing the act by the year 2006. The act mandates that residue levels in all food must be determined by the EPA as “safe”, indicating that there is “a reasonable certainty that no harm will result from aggregate exposure." Organophosphates and carbamates will be the first pesticides reviewed. Eventually every registered pesticide formulation (about 20,000) will be evaluated. It has been estimated that as many as 30 to 50% of pesticides could be banned from the market, ultimately affecting every area of agriculture.

The loss of registered pesticides could cause decreased crop yields in the majority of crops in the United States. Chemical manufacturers may not be able to invest capital into research for new, safer chemicals on minor-use crops, due to the extensive and costly requirements of maintaining EPA registrations. The pesticides used on major crops are more lucrative and with the new “risk cup” method of the FQPA, companies may be forced to cancel minor-use pesticides to remain profitable. This could be detrimental to California agriculture, considering the abundance of vegetables, fruits, and specialty crops produced exclusively throughout the state. Growers may be forced to find more expensive, less efficient alternatives to pesticides that have been relied upon.

The EPA, USDA, and chemical manufacturers are cooperating to ensure fair implementation of the law, re-registration of current pesticides, and the development of new compounds. The EPA has established committees to process the concerns of agriculturists, environmentalists, consumers, and other lobbyists. A web site has also been established to keep people informed on the latest developments of this important issue. Grant funds have been authorized by the USDA to generate data to support minor use registration. USDA and university researchers are currently testing compounds and different use rates of pesticides with hopes of discovering alternatives to the chemicals that will be phased out.

The agricultural community can influence the EPA’s decisions and future legislation regarding pesticides by voicing opinions and concerns. Because congressional leaders respond to the reactions of the public and officials are elected to serve the public, the voice of united agriculturists can be heard in government. The EPA has begun to implement forums and advisory committees to hear the opinions of agricultural professionals in the reviewing process of pesticides.

The Food Quality and Protection Act will heavily influence the types of pesticides that will be used in the near future. The United States relies upon pesticides to produce high yields and exceptional food quality. With the implementation of this act, many common practices in farming will have to change radically. With awareness, knowledge, and the will to influence government, the agricultural community can help the EPA develop a plan to review pesticides that will be sympathetic to all involved.

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