

Registering Herbicides in Specialty Crops - An Industry Perspective

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The level of past industry participation in herbicide minor crop uses has been a function of discovery output and the combination of incentives and barriers that drive minor use registration decisions. Over the past ten to fifteen years there have been several external factors that have negatively impacted the rate of new herbicide production from industry. These include industry consolidation, a decrease in the global value of the conventional herbicide market, adoption of HTC technology, a substantial increase in regulatory activity primarily through re-registration programs in the U.S. and EU, and increased costs of discovery research and product development. This increased cost of doing business in an increasingly competitive market has undoubtedly forced industry players to adopt different discovery strategies. For instance companies may focus future efforts only on crops where HTC technology has not, or is not anticipated, to reduce market value.

Business economics dictate that companies will focus only on crops and discovery effort that will create a significant positive return on investment. And in most cases development of new herbicides for minor crops is not economically viable due to low or negative return on investment and disproportionate liability risk. Also, most multinational companies focus primary on conventional chemistry rather than organic approaches, where regulatory processes are complex and success is rarely achieved. However it is very possible in the future to produce active ingredients derived from natural products, a discovery approach currently taken by several multinational companies. However, to motivate increased participation companies need incentives and mechanisms to mitigate risk.

The IR-4 program and increased data protection are current government programs in place that defray cost and provide incentives. Other incentives should be explored to make minor crops more attractive targets. Examples of this are reduced registration timelines and fees, and possibly extended patent protection. However liability risk and/or dedicating the necessary resources to adequately research crop selectivity are still major economic barriers. Creative solutions to ensure that companies are not unreasonably exposed to yield loss claims would remove one primary reason why companies are reluctant to register their herbicides for minor crops.

Additional Index Words: Minor crops; specialty crops; weed control; industry.

Abbreviations: IR-4, Interregional Project 4; HTC, herbicide tolerant crop