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EPA Approves More "Forever Chemical" Pesticides for Food Crops

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The Environmental "Protection" Agency (EPA) has found another curious way to Make America Healthy Again.

As Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. is traversing the country in a midterm push and urging Americans to "Eat Real Food," the EPA keeps adding more harmful pesticides for use on major food crops.

This week, the agency, whose stated mission is "to protect human health and the environment," approved a batch of pesticide actions affecting corn, soybeans, wheat, oats, apples, almonds, oranges, coffee, kiwi, peas, kale, and broccoli. Among them are three pesticides known as PFAS, or "forever chemicals."

The approvals included diflufenican and epyrifenacil, two pesticide active ingredients never before used in the United States, according to the Center for Biological Diversity (CFBD). EPA also approved trifludimoxazin.

Advocates say that made it the fifth PFAS pesticide approval of President Donald Trump's current term.

The decision came on the heels of the Supreme Court's ruling in the Monsanto case. It held, in practical terms, that if the EPA approves a pesticide label, state courts may not require a different warning through failure-to-warn lawsuits. It makes the EPA's judgment far more consequential than before. Once the agency blesses the chemical and the label, injured Americans may find it much harder to sue later.

The Approvals

According to memoranda posted by the agency, the two new herbicide active ingredients target waterhemp and Palmer amaranth. Those are two aggressive weeds that have become harder for farmers to control.

Diflufenican, registered by Bayer CropScience as Convintro, targets those weeds in corn and soybeans.

Epyrifenacil, sold by Valent U.S.A. as Rapidicil, is a burndown herbicide. It is used on canola, field corn, soybean, wheat, and fallow land (corn, soybean, and wheat). It is also applied to non-agricultural and non-crop areas.

EPA described both as useful tools for managing resistant weeds.

According to *Progressive Farmer*, some agriculture groups echoed that argument. The American Soybean Association praised EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin and the agency for advancing "new crop

protection tools." The American Farm Bureau Federation said the products would help farmers "do more with less."

Farmers face real weed pressure. Resistant weeds raise costs and reduce yields. The question is whether the answer should include new chemicals that can persist in water, soil, and living systems … well, forever.

Forever Chemicals

"PFAS" stands for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances. The public knows them as "forever chemicals" because many resist natural breakdown.

PFAS are used in or associated with products ranging from firefighting foam and nonstick cookware to stain-resistant fabrics, food packaging, industrial products, and pesticides.

The National Institute of Environmental Health Studies (NIEHS) explains that PFAS can leak into soil, water, and air over time, and that people are most likely exposed through contaminated water or food, PFAS-containing products, or air-containing PFAS. Because they break down slowly, if at all, repeated exposure can allow some PFAS to build up in people and animals.

For human health, NIEHS says research has found possible links between exposure to certain PFAS and adverse outcomes. That includes increased risk of some cancers, reduced immune function, altered metabolism, and childhood obesity risk. It also linked PFAS exposure to delayed puberty in girls, reduced bone-mineral density, increased risk of Type 2 diabetes in women, thyroid cancer, and consistent evidence of liver damage.

Not every PFAS chemical carries the same risk. But the class is troubling because many of these compounds persist, spread, and accumulate faster than public agencies can clean them up.

PFAS Dispute

EPA rejects the label in the case of its latest approvals. According to CFBD:

> The EPA has stated in press materials that these new fluorinated pesticides are not PFAS. That assertion is based on the fact that they do not meet the Chemicals Office's unilateral regulatory PFAS definition.

The report points to the fact that scientists, environmental groups, and a majority of the American states rely on a broader scientific definition:

> But the new pesticides do meet the much more widely accepted PFAS definition that was developed transparently by dozens of scientists around the world.
>
> That definition has subsequently been endorsed by more than 150 leading PFAS researchers, is used by nearly every U.S. state for regulating PFAS, and specifically was written into past versions of the National Defense Authorization Act.

Under that approach, diflufenican, epyrifenacil and trifludimoxazin qualify as PFAS because of their fluorinated carbon structures. CFBD says that EPA previously acknowledged broader PFAS definitions on its fluorinated pesticides webpage. However, it later removed the conflict and presented the

agency's narrower definition as controlling.

The practical concern involves degradation. EPA has found that diflufenican and epyrifenacil can break down into smaller PFAS chemicals, including trifluoroacetic acid, or TFA. Trifludimoxazin, meanwhile, does not appear to break down into TFA, but EPA found it can break down into 12 other PFAS chemicals.

Cancer Questions

The Center for Food Safety (CFS) accused EPA of dismissing evidence from company studies and independent scientists when approving several pesticides.

The group reported that epyrifenacil caused liver tumors in male mice. It said fluoxapiprolin, a separate, newly approved fungicide, caused uterine cancer and thymus gland tumors in female rats. EPA classified both as "not likely to be carcinogenic to humans."

Trifludimoxazin also carries a warning signal. CFS noted that the EPA's own earlier analyses found "suggestive evidence" that the herbicide causes cancer. The group also said EPA found likely severe harm to several threatened and endangered fish. That included Chinook salmon and steelhead trout populations, Atlantic sturgeon, and smalltooth sawfish.

EPA claims its review process accounts for hazard, exposure, environmental fate and legal residue limits on food. It also says federal law requires a "reasonable certainty of no harm" before EPA sets tolerances for residues. Critics say the agency leans too heavily on registrant studies and too quickly discounts adverse signals.

Chlormequat Joins the List

Both CFBD and CFS noted that EPA approved the first food uses of chlormequat chloride on wheat, barley, and oats. Chlormequat is not a PFAS pesticide. It is a plant growth regulator that shortens and stiffens grain stalks, making crops less likely to bend before harvest. Yet it is far from benign.

Per CFBD:

> Chlormequat is found in the urine of 90% of Americans, thought to come mostly from residues on imported foods where the pesticide has been used.… The pesticide has been linked to reduced fertility, reproductive toxicity and birth defects.

The advocates said EPA's approval opens the door to the much wider use on grain crops. Bill Freese, CFS's science director, said EPA "should never have approved this endocrine disrupting pesticide," especially because wheat and oats are so widely eaten.

"Deregulation"

The latest approvals fit a broader pattern.

Under Zeldin, EPA has kept some headline protections while reopening, delaying, or narrowing others.

On PFAS, the agency moved to keep drinking water limits for PFOA and PFOS. But it also announced plans to extend some compliance deadlines to 2031 and to rescind federal drinking-water rules for PFHxS, PFNA, GenX chemicals, and certain PFAS mixtures. Those chemicals are linked to immune, developmental, reproductive, and other health concerns.

The agency also proposed rolling back PFAS reporting requirements for chemical manufacturers and terminated grants for PFAS research.

The same pattern extends beyond "forever chemicals."

The agency also launched what Zeldin called "the greatest day of deregulation our nation has seen." The action targets rules on power plants, oil and gas operations, vehicle emissions, coal ash, wastewater, regional haze, particulate pollution, hazardous air pollutants, and the Endangerment Finding that underpins climate regulation.

Perhaps in the most impactful move, EPA repealed 2024 updates to mercury and air toxics standards for coal and oil-fired power plants. Those standards covered pollutants such as mercury, acid gases, nickel, arsenic, lead, formaldehyde, and dioxins. EPA framed the repeal as cost savings and energy reliability.

The agency spun the push as a vehicle for economic growth. Indeed, some prior regulations may well have been redundant. But in practice, much of this "deregulation" means something simpler: Fewer obligations for corporate polluters, weaker guardrails for public health, and more contamination risk pushed downstream to the public.

Constitutional Reminder

Taken together, the developments are another reminder that the federal government has no constitutional authority to manage the environment as a national administrative domain. As this magazine has long argued, that power should return to the states, local communities and families who are currently forced to live with the consequences of harmful federal policies that are often shaped by the corporate lobby.