

## PESTICIDES

### EPA expands use of bee-killing chemical

Marc Heller and Ariana Figueroa, E&E News reporters

Published: Friday, July 12, 2019



Sulfoxaflor can be used to control insects on cotton plants, pictured here. Corteva Agrosience

EPA said today it's expanding the allowed uses of a pesticide that was briefly banned in 2015 due to the danger it posed to bees.

Environmentalists decried the news as a "bow to industry."

The agency is giving long-term approval to sulfoxaflor, an alternative to a class of pesticides called neonicotinoids that have also become embroiled in debate over threats to pollinators.

"We are very pleased to take this action because it will help growers all over America," said Alex Dunn, EPA's assistant administrator for the Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention, in a conference call with reporters.

Today's decision means sulfoxaflor can be regularly applied to crops for which it hasn't been approved, such as cotton and sorghum. The approval also includes uses on major crops such as corn, alfalfa, soybeans and citrus, among other plants.

The agency said sulfoxaflor, made by Dow AgroSciences LLC, is an important and highly effective tool against insects such as sugarcane aphids and tarnished plant bugs, and that farmers have few alternative treatments against such pests.

Officials said the renewed registration takes into account the need to protect pollinators — including through revised language on the packaging labels and restrictions on use during flowering — and is based on scientific data the agency has collected over the past several years. Use of sulfoxaflor was stopped, except in emergency situations, after a federal court ordered its registration revoked in 2015 in response to a lawsuit from beekeepers.

A year later, EPA approved a scaled-back registration that restricted sulfoxaflor's use and didn't allow it on cotton or sorghum. But officials have frequently allowed its use on an emergency basis on cotton and sorghum, sparking objections from groups such as the Center for Biological Diversity, which opposes the use of many pesticides.

Those crops are often visited by bees, according to the CBD, which said the chemical could be spread on as many as 200 million acres.

EPA based the new registration mostly on industry-sponsored studies, Dunn said, adding that most of those studies are performed with independent contract labs.

Earlier this year, the CBD reported that EPA in 2018 approved sulfoxaflor for emergency use on more than 16 million acres of crops in 2018. Of the 18 states for which emergency uses were approved on cotton and sorghum, 12 received approvals in each of the four consecutive years.

The emergency uses amount to a backdoor method of approving a pesticide that couldn't pass muster through normal channels, the CBD said.

In a statement today, the CBD called the announcement a "terrible blow to imperiled pollinators" and said it would fight the decision in court.

"With no opportunity for independent oversight or review, this autocratic administration's appalling decision to bow to industry and grant broad approval for this highly toxic insecticide leaves us with no choice but to take legal action."

In allowing more emergency uses in June, EPA said the risk from insects justifies the chemical's use.

"EPA determined that the devastating spread of the pests and potential economic loss to the growers met the criteria for an emergency exemption," the agency said then, adding that in the past, the pesticide has been used on fewer acres than the states' applications have requested.

"The tarnished plant bug and sugarcane aphid are massive threats to cotton and sorghum crops, respectively. There are few viable options for controlling these problems, and pests have developed resistance to some of the former alternatives," EPA said.

In a news release today, EPA said sulfoxaflor doesn't need to be applied as regularly as other chemicals, which are effective only when used repeatedly or in a tank mix, which may pose greater risks to wildlife.

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