

2,4,5-T Issue Phony, Say Weed Experts

by THORNE GRAY
Modesto, Calif.

Weed control experts are on the offensive in California to stand behind chemical herbicides, especially the controversial 2,4,5-T and its relative 2,4-D, in the face of what some consider a "phony" pesticide issue.

"This whole flap has no scientific meaning whatsoever, none whatsoever," is the way Professor Boysie E. Day of the horticultural science department at the University of California at Riverside summed up the controversy. "It's a phony issue."

Day and others made their views known in interviews during the 22nd annual California Weed Conference held in Anaheim Jan. 19 and 21. What to do about 2,4,5-T and 2,4-D, and what to do without them if they are restricted, were the hottest topics of conversation among the more



Day

Schweers

Elmore

Sylwester

than 800 conference participants.

The herbicide 2,4,5-T came under fire last October from Dr. Lee A. DuBridge, science adviser to President Richard Nixon, who was influenced by findings in a government-contracted study by Bionetics Research Laboratories. The studies, since considered suspect because of a chemical impurity in the samples used, showed a correlation between birth defects and deformities in laboratory animals and exposure to the pesticide. At about the same time, other reports were linking the herbicide to birth defects being noted in Vietnam, where 2,4,5-T is used extensively as a jungle and brush defoliant and where pregnant Vietnamese women may have been directly sprayed.

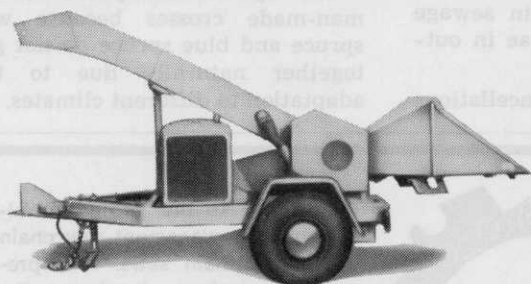
"2,4,5-T has never appeared in any

significant quantity in the food environment at all," said Day, who said he made a special effort to find out what was motivating government sentiment against the chemical.

"Over the past two years in some 25,000 market place analyses, 2,4,5-T was discovered in three samples and the average rate of occurrence was about .008 parts per million in those," he said. "If we can assume this is an average, and that's a fair number of samples to base an average on, there is not enough 2,4,5-T in all the food in the world to affect one person if he could eat that much."

Day said the Bionetics study indicated a pregnant woman weighing 125 pounds would have to ingest about 250 milligrams per day for six days to "get near the threshold of

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causing some birth defects." Based on the 25,000 food samples, he calculated the woman would have to eat no less than 1,000 tons of food per day just to consume one milligram of the herbicide. "I submit this is meaningless," he concluded.

Dr. E. P. "Dutch" Sylwester, a weed control specialist from Iowa State University and conference key-note, said troubles with herbicides have arisen in many instances "from misuse rather than use."

"If we are using dangerous things, let's drop them so as to be beyond reproach," Sylwester said. "Let's use only the best. There are more than 800 materials, and not all of them pesticides, which are under close scrutiny but while they are at it, why not look at some of the things which we have always taken for granted like aspirin, tetraethyl lead, fingernail polish, turpentine, alcohol, tobacco or exhaust fumes."

Conference participant Clyde Elmore, a botanist and turf specialist from the University of California at Davis, stressed the importance of 2,4,5-T and 2,4-D to the turf industry.

"I would say if any homeowner is interested in killing weeds in his lawn, he would use one of these," Elmore said. "There is a tremendous acreage just in the homeowner and turf industries which could be or would be hampered by the loss of any one of the compounds in the 2,4,5-T family."

Elmore said an overdose or a misapplication of the herbicides is easy to detect from crop damage, and therefore the chemicals are not likely to be used near food crops or at strengths for which they are not registered. He also noted 2,4,5-T and 2,4-D break down relatively quickly into harmless components, in contrast to "persistent" pesticides such as DDT, and they do not accumulate in food chains.

"We know that weed control chemicals are safe if used according to label instructions and no one need worry about any chemical residue on their food," said UC farm adviser Vincent H. Schweers of Visalia, president of the weed conference. "Weed control chemicals are checked and rechecked and then registered with the federal and state governments for specific safe uses. The University of California gathers its own performance data and spot checks residue data on weed control chemicals before giving a University recommendation. As a follow-up, the federal Food and Drug Administration and the State Department of Agriculture participate in monitoring crops for residues. The facts are in our favor."

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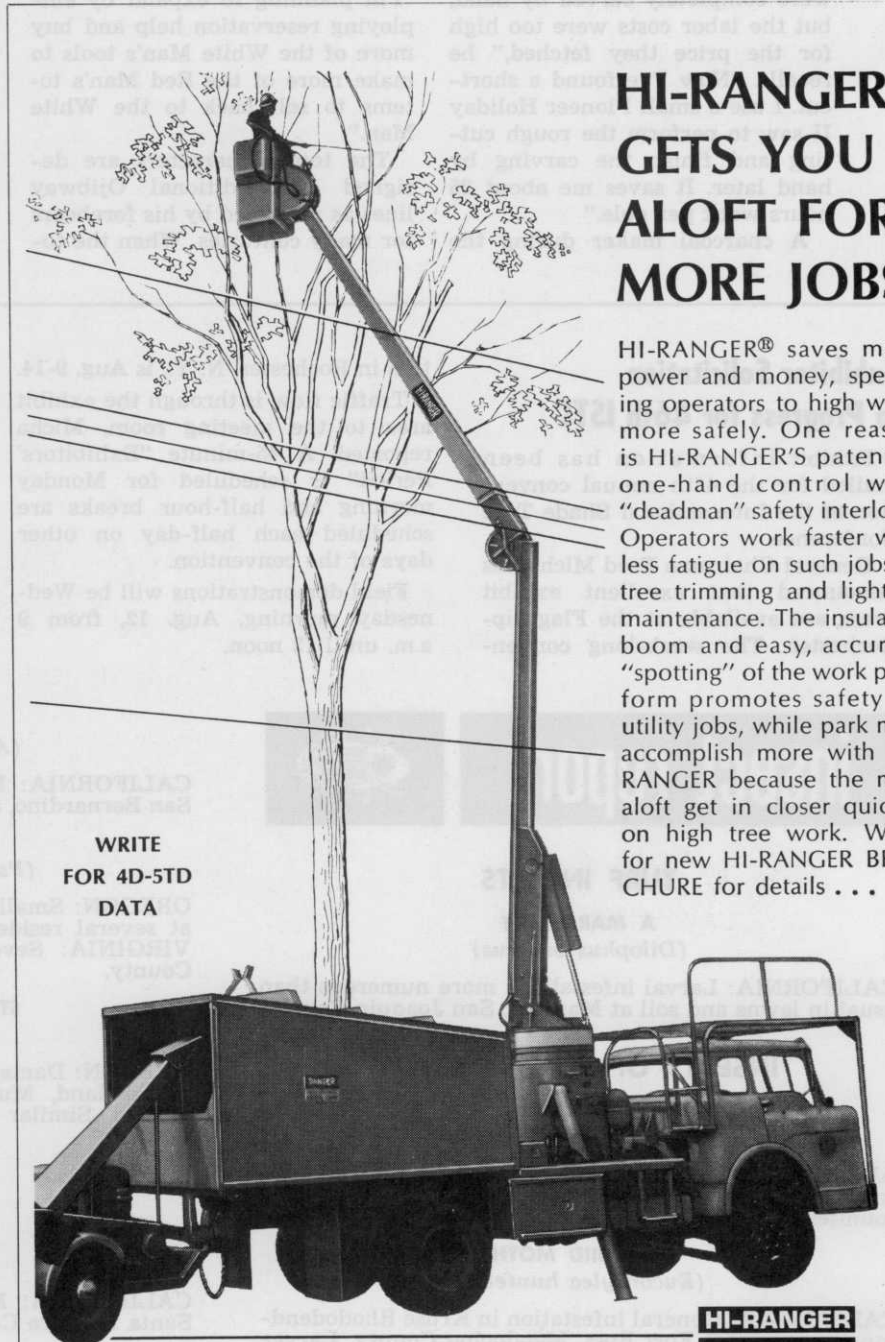
A new turfgrass variety, Highlight Chewings Fescue, has been licensed for sale in Canada by the Canadian Department of Agriculture.

A product of Ontario Seed Cleaners and Dealers, Ltd., of Brampton, Ontario, Highlight is said to be the first variety of Chewings Fescue to show sufficient winter hardiness to be used safely across Canada. It has been tested and is in use also in

the U.S. and Europe.

Ontario Seed Cleaners says Highlight should be used in a mixture with a blend of Kentucky Bluegrass for lawns and fairways. It can be blended 50/50 with Penncross Bentgrass in golf greens or other places where close mowing is desirable. The seed firm says Highlight tends to "lift" Penncross and reduces thatching.

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