

OUTLOOK

By Bruce F. Shank, Executive Editor

Conflicting signals on pesticide development

A recent increase in the number of pesticide products gaining registration will hopefully continue, but signals from industry and government seem to indicate otherwise.

Mergers may play a role equal to government regulation in the future development of pesticides. Mobil's sale of its agricultural chemical division to Rhone Poulenc was surprising in light of its participation in the Conoco takeover. Du Pont's interest in Conoco is fairly evident since it is highly dependent upon oil resources for its products. The Boots/Fisons merger in the U.S. seems to show togetherness is better in chemical development and marketing.

The result of mergers is obvious; fewer, bigger chemical companies. Does this mean that combining resources will improve research investment and result in more new products?

Or will it mean less competition, dropping of minor use products, and higher prices?

Both the cost of registration and liability in case of disposal problems is forcing chemical companies to be more selective in products offered. This extra caution is necessary for chemical companies to protect their market stability in today's merger-mad market.

Integrated pest management is expected to cut agricultural chemical sales in the next decade. Since most landscape products are developed from agricultural products, the prospects are not as rosy even though IPM is not expected to cut landscape chemical use appreciably.

Biological or bacterial production of chemicals is the new wave. No chemical company wants to be left out of that market as it develops due to technological breakthroughs.

Data compensation between chemical companies is still not resolved by the Environmental Protection Agency.

Data is still duplicated at high cost to support new registrations when it exists in the files of other companies.

On top of all this, EPA's new administration has reorganized the enforcement division. Companies now have to get new assurance of the rules before proceeding with current and new products.

The small manufacturer must feel lost in all this confusion.

Regardless of the intent of the Reagan administration to provide more encouragement to manufacturers, market conditions are keeping the lid on and finishing the job EPA started in the early 70's. The numbers get bigger and bigger. Small users have a harder time gaining the attention of chemical manufacturers. And the prices keep going up.

You can't blame the chemical companies. They, like you and I, are trying to survive. With so many conflicting signals, they have to be cautious and we have to fight harder for attention. **WTT**



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