

Quality and Safe Food Demands Crop Protection Tools

Ninety percent of Whatcom's farmland growing berries and seed potatoes could be taken out of production. EPA is currently moving forward with big dumb buffers of 500 to 1,000 feet for many of the crucial crop protection tools we rely upon. Despite continual, repeated representations made by our farmers to EPA regarding this concern they are callously moving forward with implementing these buffers based on their "potential" effect on salmon.

There is little to no evidence that trace levels of these pesticides are even harming salmon - This is just a "might be" or "could be" scenario. Using logic like that, we should eliminate autos - we know they are a significant source of pollution. Crop protection materials are essential for food production in modern agriculture; they are safer for consumers and the environment than they have ever been. Food today is tested far more extensively than ever before to make sure it is safe for consumption, and that includes pesticide residuals. Believe us - these regulations could destroy our domestic food supply - leading to unbelievable price increases and the rampant exodus of agriculture to foreign countries. These products are necessary and safe for a stable food supply.

The high cost of farmland in Whatcom County necessitates the production of high value crops. These crops are grown with sophisticated; Washington State Department of Agriculture tested and approved integrated pest management practices. Those management practices are basic tools necessary for sustainable farming. These are safe tools farmers must have to grow berries and seed potatoes here. Without these practices growing quality food that is both safe and desired by customers would not be possible. No farmer is going to poison the product he/she works so hard to produce and sell. No farmer is dumb enough to want to destroy the very environment that sustains his/her family. Moreover, what farmer is going to spend thousands of dollars for pesticides casually, to say nothing about the cost of application, and time being trained to use them responsibly?

Successful, sustainable farming requires farmers to use all the tools in the toolbox. EPA's proposed "big dumb buffers" would take that option away. The Spotted Wing Drosophila (SWD) has recently emerged as a, new threat to Pacific Northwest berry crops. In the evolutionary environment of farming this phenomena isn't new. Indeed farmers have forever needed to adapt to an ever changing mother nature. It is SWD today, something else tomorrow. What the EPA is proposing to do is akin to stopping the clock. Mother Nature doesn't stop.

How did EPA arrive at 500-1000 feet for a buffer size? There is no clear, supported evidence. In a square, 30 acre Whatcom County field surrounded by ditches, 500 foot buffers would leave only a half acre usable in the center of the field. On a piece of land worth \$450,000, only about 1.7 percent of it would be usable. It is not rocket science that such draconian, ad hoc measures would kill berry and seed potato farmers.

All of our farmers are concerned about the safety and well being of our environment. Farmers take their role as "stewards of the earth" seriously which is deeply rooted in

scripture, e.g., (Luke 12:41-48, Matthew 25:14-30). In the end, it is the environment that underpins sustainable farming. Farmers are not opposed to reasonable and responsible regulations in pesticide management. Our farmers already have stringent, well regulated practices that have proven safe for producers and consumers over for many years. Farmers have no problem being held accountable in meeting standards, but standards that are based on facts and sound science - and the practicalities dictated by local conditions.

Our farmers know better than most why sustaining Whatcom County agriculture is important. Interestingly, Lisa Jackson, EPA's Administrator ago traveled to Iowa with the Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack. While she was there the Des Moines Register quoted her as saying, "American farmers are among the finest conservationists...if we are to solve major environmental challenges...farmers need more than just a seat at the table. They need to help lead the way." We agree. Now she needs to lead the way with her staff.

Fortunately legislators in Washington are working on legislation that would stop this 1,000 foot nonsense. Congressman Larsen on the House side, and Senators Murray and Cantwell have already heard our voices on this. They need continued encouragement. Farm Friends asks for your help. Tell our Senators and Representative that "big dumb buffers with one size fits all" laid on the backs of our farmers is wrong, unfair and not responsible public policy. Help us sustain Whatcom agriculture and keep farmers farming.

Whatcom Farm Friends Board