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Monsanto Asks Trump EPA to OK Drift-prone Pesticide on 90 Million Acres of Corn

By Center For Biological Diversity
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The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced today it will consider allowing the highly drift-prone pesticide dicamba to be sprayed on up to 90 million acres of corn.

Dicamba is produced by Monsanto, which is now owned by Bayer. Drift from dicamba sprayed on cotton and soybean fields has damaged an estimated 5 million acres of crops, trees and backyard gardens over the past three years. That has prompted several states to restrict its use.

> "Use of this dangerous, uncontrollable toxin should be banned, not expanded," said Nathan Donley, a senior scientist with the Center for Biological Diversity. "With millions of acres of crops, orchards and natural areas already harmed by this volatile herbicide, Trump's EPA should reject Monsanto's self-serving request to dramatically escalate its use."

Highly toxic dicamba products are designed for use primarily on crops genetically engineered to resist what would normally be a fatal dose of the pesticide. The EPA has already approved dicamba for use on genetically engineered soybean and cotton crops.

> In 2016 the U.S. Department of Agriculture approved corn crops genetically engineered to survive dicamba. Today's application seeks approval from the EPA to spray dicamba on genetically engineered corn. It also aims to establish legally permissible levels of the pesticide in food that people eat.
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> "Even after the EPA increased training for dicamba users, drift from this poison has killed 100-year-old oak trees and withered backyard vegetable patches and entire fields of non-GE crops," said Donley. "Carelessly expanding dicamba use will spread its harm across the American heartland."

Dicamba use also poses a significant threat to imperiled wildlife. A 2018 Center report found that more than 60 million acres of monarch butterfly habitat are projected to be sprayed with dicamba by next year. And today's proposal to expand the use of dicamba to corn would expand the acreage of monarch habitat sprayed.

Dicamba can degrade monarch habitat in two ways. It can harm flowering plants that provide nectar for adult butterflies as they travel south for the winter, and it can kill milkweed, which, as the only food of monarch caterpillars, is essential for the butterfly's reproduction.

Monarch butterfly populations have been hard hit by pesticides, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is currently considering whether to give Endangered Species Act protections to the iconic migratory butterfly.

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