WASHINGTON, Jan. 3, 2014 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) today released for public input its Draft Environmental Impact Statements (DEIS), which calls for the deregulation of genetically engineered (GE) corn and soybeans engineered to be tolerant to the toxic herbicide 2,4-D. According to
Nichelle Harriott
, senior scientist at the national environmental group
Beyond Pesticides
, "The engineered varieties will not only spawn new weed resistant strains, but contaminate the environment and increase the public health risks to cancer and Parkinson's disease, especially in farmworkers and farming communities exposed to 2,4-D."

These new varieties of GE corn and soybean, created partly due to proliferate weed resistance resulting from the widespread use of glyphosate (Roundup) on other GE crops, is set to usher in dramatic increases in 2,4-D use with associated health and environmental hazards, according to environmental scientists.

The failure of GE-glyphosate (Roundup) tolerant crops to live up to their promises is a main contributing factor behind the development of stacked varieties of 2,4-D GE corn and soybean. So widespread is glyphosate resistance that EPA has granted emergency use exemptions for pesticides with unregistered uses in agriculture, like fluridone. One 2012 report shows that GE crops have been responsible for an increase of 404 million pounds of pesticide, or about 7%, in the U.S. over the first 16 years of commercial use of GE crops (1996-2011), which means that 2,4-D use is expected to increase dramatically in GE fields.

While USDA attempts to assure the public that 2,4-D is safe, the science has raised serious concerns about the safety of this herbicide, which was used as a key ingredient in "Agent Orange," used to defoliate forests and croplands in the Vietnam War. Scientists around the world have reported increased cancer risks in association with its use, especially for non-Hodgkin Lymphoma (NHL). It is also neurotoxic, genotoxic, and an endocrine disruptor. Studies have also reported that occupational exposure to 2,4-D is associated with an increased risk of Parkinson's disease.

The proposed deregulation of these GE crops is being met with criticism from farmers,

environmentalists and other concerned groups. Similar to previous decisions to deregulate other varieties of GE soybeans, alfalfa, and sugar beets, safety advocates charge that USDA fails to take into account several scientifically-validated environmental concerns, such as the indiscriminate nature of GE gene flow among crops, a heavy reliance on faulty data, and a high degree of uncertainties in making safety determinations. At issue is 2,4-D drift that has long been a known problem to off-site locations, endangered species and non-target crops, as well as the threat of dioxin contamination.

"In the age of organic agriculture it is irresponsible to be introducing a failed technology reliant on 2,4-D with all its known hazards to human health and the environment," said Jay Feldman, executive director of Beyond Pesticides.

Contact: Nichelle Harriott, Jay Feldman202-543-5450 www.beyondpesticides.org

SOURCE Beyond Pesticides

RELATED LINKS http://www.beyondpesticides.org