



NAFTA Technical Working Group on Pesticides
Grupo de Trabajo Técnico del TLCAN sobre Plaguicidas
Le groupe de travail technique de l' ALENA sur les pesticides

NAFTA TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP ON PESTICIDES
Arlington, Virginia
May 17-18, 2007

MEETING SUMMARY

Introduction

The Executive Board of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) Technical Working Group on Pesticides (TWG) met in Arlington, Virginia, on May 17-18, 2007. The meeting was hosted by Debra Edwards, Ph D, Director of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Office of Pesticides Programs (OPP). Government officials from Mexico, the United States, and Canada attended, including Amada Velez, Directora General de Inocuidad Agroalimentaria, Acuícola y Pesquera of the Mexican agriculture agency known as SAGARPA (Secretaría de Agricultura, Ganadería, Desarrollo Rural, Pesca y Alimentación) and Richard Aucoin, Chief Registrar and Director General, Registration Directorate of Health Canada's Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA).

Opening Remarks and Country Updates

Debra Edwards welcomed the NAFTA government officials, noting how successful the TWG has been as a model for international collaboration on harmonized scientific methods, worksharing, and problem solving. Ms. Edwards then provided an update on key US pesticides activities of interest to the NAFTA TWG, including the Endangered Species Act, endocrine disruptors, registration review, worker protection, drift and volatilization issues.

Amada Velez reported that 2006 was a transition year in Mexico, a new president was elected and changes will continue inside the Mexican government. However, regulatory agencies will maintain their participation in the TWG, specifically on MRL/Registration Gap (avocados/tolerances) and Risk Reduction Subcommittee (worker safety) activities. She also announced that the next TWG meeting is tentatively scheduled for November 7-9, 2007 in Mexico.

Richard Aucoin then provided an update on key domestic regulatory activities in Canada, including efforts to develop a harmonized classification system for domestic pesticides, the development of a guidance document outlining application of precaution in pesticide regulation, application of uncertainty and safety factors in human health assessments of pesticides, and recent organizational changes at the PMRA.

Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs/Tolerances)/Registration Gap

One of the main goals of the TWG is to provide equal access to pesticide products in North America and establish appropriate maximum residue limits (MRLs) or tolerances that meet safety standards and permit legal trade. Yet, due to the difference in the number, type, and timing of pesticide submissions made in each of the three NAFTA countries, a gap currently exists in the needed pesticide products available to growers and the appropriate MRLs/tolerances necessary to facilitate legal trade in safe food. The TWG has been pursuing solutions to this gap in both registrations and MRLs/tolerances among the NAFTA partners. Government officials reported on various activities underway to address this situation, both retrospectively and prospectively, as outlined below.

As agreed at the last TWG meeting held in December 2006, NAFTA officials have been working with key stakeholders, including the U.S. Minor Crop Farmers Alliance and the Canadian Horticulture Council, to develop a Grower Priority List for the registration of products and the establishment of MRLs. The TWG leads reported that a comprehensive survey has been conducted, with survey responses from nine groups representing twenty-two (22) commodities obtained to date. This information has been placed into a database, which government officials expect to receive from the growers shortly. The TWG leads will analyze the database and identify appropriate mechanisms for addressing these grower priorities, taking into account several factors such as registrant support, effective use of resources, and any risk issues. A systematic approach will be developed to address grower priority needs on a primarily chemical basis. The Executive Board asked for an update at the next TWG meeting, including a detailed presentation from the growers outlining how the priorities were determined.

The Executive Board approved plans outlined in a TWG project sheet for a new avocado commodity pilot, and received an update on continued progress under the existing pilots for pulse crops, tomatoes, and potatoes. As part of the transition to a chemical-based approach for the resolution of trade irritants, the Executive Board asked the TWG leads to complete work on the current priorities for which work has begun and to incorporate the remaining priorities for these commodity-based pilots into the Grower Priority List.

The Joint Review leads outlined a robust workplan of six (6) new joint reviews and seven (7) new workshares anticipated over the next few years, both in the NAFTA context and globally. In addition, an initial analysis of domestic agency workplans indicates a significant degree of overlap in U.S. and Canadian registration actions for new conventional pesticides and biopesticides, that will help address the MRL/registration gap. Similar analyses will be conducted for use expansions, minor uses, and antimicrobials, as well as further refinements to the TWG performance indicators. These comparative analyses of the U.S. and Canadian workplans will serve as an on-going management tool to identify opportunities for addressing the MRL/registration gap and monitor progress.

Canada reported on the status of the revocation of the 0.1 ppm General MRL Policy, indicating that a follow up to the consultation document will be released shortly that summarizes and addresses comments received during the 2006 public consultation process, and outlines final decisions and next steps on implementation efforts.

The Executive Board approved worksharing efforts outlined by the U.S. Registration Review and Canadian Re-evaluation program leads, including development of a multi-year workplan and implementation of two pilots to guide future pesticide re-evaluation efforts. The Executive Board also approved a proposal to develop and implement a coordinated NAFTA strategy on the phase-out of azinphos-methyl (AZM), including the effective transition to lower risk pest management tools. A new TWG project sheet on the AZM phase-out initiative will be developed and presented to the Executive Board for approval.

Representatives from the U.S. IR-4 program and the Canadian Pest Management Center (PMC) highlighted significant progress in conducting residue field trials (including joint studies), and preparing joint submissions to the regulatory agencies in support of minor use registrations in both the United States and Canada. From 2003 to 2006, a total of fifty-three (53) projects with 191 Canadian field trials and 359 U.S. field trials, were conducted by PMC and IR-4. A total of ten (10) joint review submissions have been completed thus far, with five (5) more joint review submissions expected this year. The Executive Board indicated strong support for these efforts, including the development of a standard operating procedure on PMC/IR-4 joint review submissions. The leads also reported on NAFTA efforts related to crop groupings, and planning for the Global Minor Use Summit to be held in Rome, Italy in December 2007.

The Executive Board expressed support for a new proposal outlined by the TWG leads for a new production-based NAFTA approach for establishing the location and number of field trials required in support of a registration petition. The new proposal would go beyond the incentives already provided by the current twenty-five percent (25%) reduction approach for residue field trials that has been in place for several years. North American agricultural production figures will be compiled in the next few months and, using the existing NAFTA zone maps, the new proposal for required field trials will be developed and presented to the Executive Board at the next TWG meeting in November 2007.

Labelling

The Executive Board commended the NAFTA Label Task Force - - which is comprised of government officials, registrants, and growers - - for the successful development of two NAFTA labels to date and supported continued work on ten (10) additional candidates currently in the pipeline. The first NAFTA label was approved in January 2006 for a pesticide known as Fargo Herbicide in the United States and Avadex Micro-Active in Canada. The second NAFTA label is for Gavel 75DF Fungicide, a broad spectrum protectant fungicide, which was approved on May 16th for use on cucurbits, tomatoes, potatoes and grapes in the United States and potatoes and grapes in Canada. The task force has developed some communication materials, including a NAFTA Label Guidance Document, which will soon be posted on the EPA website.

For non-agricultural pesticides, the regulatory agencies are exploring the development of two NAFTA labels for hard surface disinfectants, and pursuing options for addressing disparate claim issues that arose in the pilot non-agricultural NAFTA label project conducted last year.

Non-Agricultural Issues

With respect to other non-agricultural issues, the United States and Canada will continue its U.S. CFR 158 W data harmonization initiative. The Executive Board asked the leads to make further changes to a revised draft project sheet on non-agricultural pesticide data requirements in order to more clearly delineate next steps in addressing differences between the Canadian Therapeutic Products Directorate (TPD) and OPP's Antimicrobial Division. TPD will be asked to provide further clarification on its data requirements for additional organism testing. In regards to the industry request to develop a new project sheet addressing differing data requirements for non-agricultural conventional chemicals, biopesticides and antimicrobials, the Executive Board would like industry stakeholders to identify priorities for harmonization and develop an initial matrix which the governments can review. The Executive Board also agreed to revisit how non-agricultural activities are coordinated within the NAFTA TWG, including prioritization and relevance to trade irritants. In response to stakeholder requests, Mexico will consider convening a Mexican registration workshop in conjunction with the next NAFTA TWG meeting to be hosted by Mexico in November 2007.

Risk Reduction

Representatives from OPP, PMRA, and the Mexican health ministry (SALUD/Cofepris) reported on the outcome of their recent worker safety meeting held on May 16, where the project leads agreed on a workplan to implement the TWG worker safety project focused on risk communication efforts. The project goals are to: promote harmonization in risk communication methods, messages and materials to focus on preventing health problems for migrant agricultural workers; share information and experience on pesticides issues and migrant agricultural workers; and, gather evidence on safety training and communication's positive impact on worker health. The project objectives are to: reduce exposure to pesticides in migrant agricultural workers and their families; and, develop a program for the proper disposal of empty pesticide containers.

Mexico proposed working with the United States and Canada to share pesticide worker safety information and materials, and form a pesticide worker safety network. The trilateral group recognized the importance of working to protect our often shared migrant agricultural pool of labor and plans to meet later this year to discuss a revised risk communication / worker safety work plan.

The TWG also received an update on U.S. pesticide container recycling efforts.

Regulatory Capacity Building

Progress under the TWG project on soil crosswalk was discussed, including completion of a draft guidance document for determining the applicability of environmental fate and transport studies conducted on foreign soils for use in environmental risk assessments. Following incorporation of comments from PMRA and SEMARNAT, and a final quality control review, the guidance document will be released for public use. The anticipated release is late Summer or early Fall. The Executive Board expressed support for a new project on determining the acceptability of terrestrial field dissipation studies conducted outside of North America.

The Executive Board received an update from PMRA leads on the development of a public consultation document related to the use of safety and uncertainty factors, including policy areas of special interest to NAFTA regulators and stakeholders. Once the public consultation document is released, PMRA plans to convene a public consultation workshop.

In the area of human health risk assessments, the TWG leads reported on the successful completion of efforts to harmonize general approaches to the analysis and use of dermal absorption studies, and recommended starting a new TWG project to further define and harmonize dermal absorption practices among the pesticide regulatory agencies. The Executive Board approved the completion sheet and new project sheet related to these efforts.

A proposed TWG initiative aimed at harmonizing how pesticide usage data is utilized by EPA and PMRA in conducting risk assessments and benefit/impact analyses, was endorsed by the Executive Board. A new TWG project sheet on estimating percent crop treated for pesticides will be developed for Executive Board review and approval. Following completion of this first project, a second project will be developed on harmonized approaches for blending pesticide information from different data sources.

Strategic Planning

Based on stakeholder input obtained during a break-out group (BOG-1) discussion at the TWG meeting held in Montreal (Dec. 2006), a first draft of the new NAFTA TWG 5-year strategy has been developed. The leads provided the Executive Board an overview of the strategy, including proposed work areas under the following three strategic objectives: (1) provide U.S., Canadian, and Mexican growers with equal access and same time introduction of new pesticides and pest management tools; (2) work cooperatively to re-evaluate/re-register older pesticides utilizing each country's re-evaluation programs to the fullest to increase efficiency (including communication, scheduling and work/information sharing); and, (3) integrate smart business approaches and practices into NAFTA TWG work. Once Executive Board review and approval is obtained, a revised document will be prepared with the goal of presenting the new 5-year strategy to the public at the next TWG stakeholder meeting tentatively scheduled for November 2007 in Mexico. A TWG accomplishments report is also under development, as well as further refinements to the draft TWG performance indicators presented at the December 2006 TWG stakeholder meeting.

Global Harmonization

The TWG discussed various global pesticide harmonization efforts, including key outcomes from recent OECD and Codex meetings, and implications for the NAFTA TWG. More focused NAFTA consultations will be held on the following OECD topics: residue chemistry guidelines; testing and assessment scheme; and an OECD Risk Reduction Steering Group train-the-trainer seminar to be held in November 2007.

Emerging Issues

PMRA officials provided a detailed briefing to the TWG on various domestic activities, including Canada's new Chemicals Management Plan (CMP) which is aimed at testing and regulating chemicals used in thousands of industrial and consumer products that are potentially harmful to human health or the environment. In this context, the Executive Board requested an update on shared and domestic efforts related to the assessment of formulants/inerts at the next TWG meeting.

EPA and PMRA agreed to share information related to spray drift and volatilization issues, with the goal of comparing scientific approaches and identifying issues of mutual concern for potential TWG collaboration.

The Executive Board discussed an industry proposal related to education outreach, and agreed to respond formally through a written correspondence.

Next Meeting

The next TWG meeting is tentatively scheduled for November 7-9, 2007 in Mexico (exact location to be determined).