GM herbicide-resistant crops, herbicides not sustainable weed control

The Register's agriculture writer, Donnelle Eller, recently reported on a startling new arrival in the state: A "superweed" that may be resistant to popular herbicides used by Iowa farmers has been found in several Iowa counties. ('Superweeds' Choke Farms," June 22.)

The story was an eye-opener for anyone concerned about the health of agriculture and agribusiness, the backbone of Iowa's economy. The presence of the menacing weed that can grow inches a day and wipe out major chunks of a corn and soybean crop should also have been a wake-up call to Iowa farmers.

Farmers can use a lot more herbicides thanks to plants that are genetically modified to be immune to the weed killer. That means less tillage that encourages soil erosion. But if the Palmer amaranth showing up in Iowa is glyphosate-resistant, farmers would have to turn to a dwindling number of effective herbicides, do more tilling of the soil or both.

Plant scientists have warned farmers that blanketing the state with corn and soybeans year after year is unsustainable. Whether farmers did not believe them or couldn't resist the financial rewards, the day of reckoning is nigh. Perhaps it will be a good thing if the arrival of a potentially devastating superweed forces more sustainable farming practices in this state.

Read the full, original article: The Register's Editorial: Who ya gonna call when the weedbusters no longer work