After cancer assessment of farm chemicals, farmers still comfortable with using herbicides

Farmers count on chemical herbicides to keep their fields weed-free. In the last few months though, scientists brought together by the International Agency for Research on Cancer considered two of the most heavily used farm chemicals and said exposure to weed-killing chemicals could come at a cost.

The panel looked at glyphosate [.pdf], the active ingredient in Monsanto's Roundup and other commercial herbicides, and determined it probably could cause cancer. For the second herbicide, 2,4-D [.pdf], which has been on the market since the 1940s, the group also said it was possible the chemical could cause cancer.

Corn and soybean farmers in the U.S. apply more than 300 million pounds of herbicides each year. Those chemicals are an important part of how Nebraska farmer Nathan Dorn does business.

Walking down a strip of grass between a field of corn and a field of soybeans, he bends down to pull up a green, leafy stalk of pigweed by its roots. He snaps the stalk like celery.

"What do you see there," asked Dorn while squeezing water out of the weed. "That's moisture this plant is using to grow that's not in there for my corn, not in there for my soybeans."

That's why, before he plants his crop, Dorn sprays the field with an herbicide cocktail. Each acre is sprayed twice, some three times, to wipe out weeds.

"You want to make sure you have crops in your fields and not weeds because weeds don't end up in the combine bin," Dorn said. "Weeds don't pay the bills."

In the end, the real risk from any chemical is tied to the dose and that's up to the EPA. Dorn is comfortable following EPA guidelines, and right now that means he'll keep using chemicals like glyphosate and 2,4-D as long as they keep killing weeds.

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis. Read full, original post: Farmers Watch As Scientists Weigh In On Common Farm Herbicides