

Bayer, BASF claim new chemical mixed with drift-prone dicamba weedkiller can minimize off-target damage

Chemical makers Bayer AG and BASF are pushing to keep a controversial weedkiller on the market after a federal court in June blocked its use in U.S. soybean and cotton fields.

The companies are seeking approvals from the Environmental Protection Agency that would allow farmers to continue spraying dicamba, a herbicide that can kill hardy weeds but has been blamed for drifting off fields and damaging millions of acres of neighboring crops. Bayer and BASF are proposing that farmers mix the weedkiller with new chemical agents that company officials said would help dicamba stay where it is sprayed.

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EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler said the agency's scientists are still reviewing the companies' dicamba-based crop sprays. "We intend to have a decision made by the middle of October," he said during an Oct. 1 presentation to the Minnesota Farm Bureau.

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Farmers' war against hard-to-kill weeds can push up their cost of raising a crop, and lift prices for food makers, livestock producers and consumers. Herbicide-resistant weeds can also threaten parks and natural lands.

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Bayer is asking the agency to consider reapproving its dicamba spray along with an additional chemical agent that the company says can keep the herbicide from moving. The additive, called an adjuvant, prevents the formation of dicamba acid, which can evaporate off of plants and drift on the wind.

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