

Biological crop treatments: Farmers divided on whether they're breakthroughs on the horizon or 'snake oil'?

Whenever the topic of microbiological crop protection products comes up, the words “snake oil” can appear. Biologicals are said to hold great promise as a powerful tool for farmers to move beyond synthetic pesticides and fertilizers, but they are still in their infancy, experiencing growing pains.

Katie Barnhill is a senior research scholar with the Genetic Engineering and Society Center at North Carolina State University. She has done extensive interviews with farmers on the use of microbiological crop production inoculants, and explained farmers remain hesitant, due to continued skepticism on the products' efficacy.

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For biologicals to be adopted by farmers, Barnhill notes that they must work and be as affordable as synthetic crop protection products. Farmers must also have complete trust in biologicals before they turn to them, and the products must offer a return on investment.

She said the challenge is that previous microbial products did not deliver on the promise of dramatically improved yields. She said it is critical that biologicals not be treated as “silver bullets.” They should serve as an additional management tool for farmers rather than a replacement for existing resources.

[**This is an excerpt. Read the original post here**](#)