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Rural California Report is a quarterly publication of the California Institute for Rural Studies (CIRS). CIRS is an independent nonprofit research and advocacy group which has studied rural issues and policies since 1977. The institute's goal is to build a society that is ecologically balanced, socially just, and economically sustainable. Toward those objectives, CIRS conducts research and public education projects, and works with individual activists in rural communities.

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L E T T E R S

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California Agricultural Pesticide Use Continues to Increase

by Don Villarejo

In late December 1996 the California Department of Pesticide Regulation released its Summary of Pesticide Use Data for 1995. Total reported pesticide use was 211.8 million pounds, up by more than 6% from 199.5 million pounds in 1994.

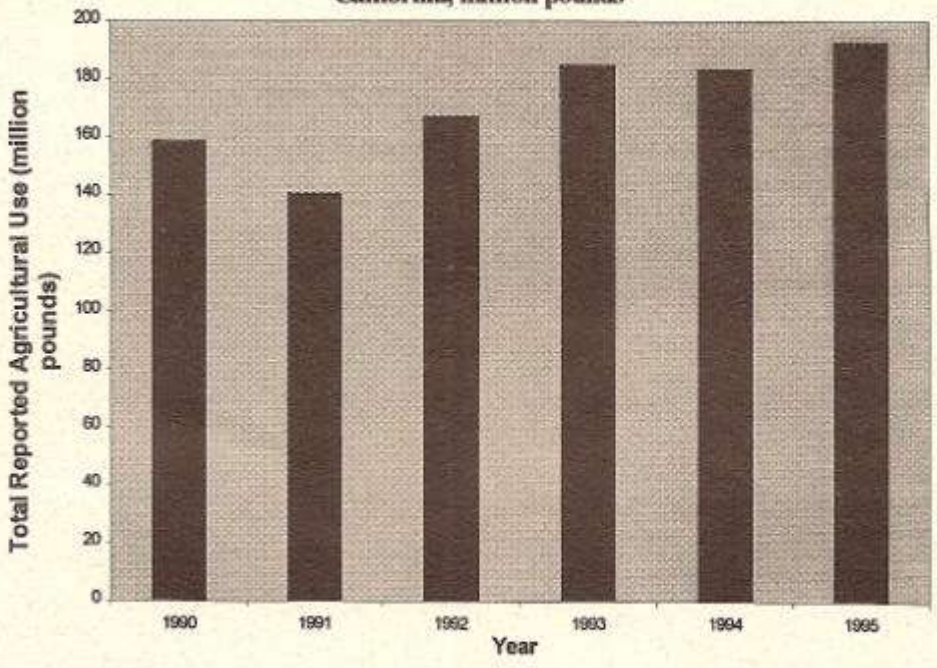
Reported agricultural pesticide use in California during 1995 was 192.5 million pounds, an increase of 5% from the 183.4 million pounds for 1994. That's about six pounds of pure pesticide per California resident, much of which remains in the environment after being applied.

For the last three years for which full reports are available (1993-95), annual reported agricultural usage averaged 186.9 million pounds. This is 18% higher than for the preceding three years (1990-92), for which the average was 158.5 million pounds.

The newly released data also show that this increase in reported pesticide usage was a reflection of increased usage in nearly all crops. The top five crops, by amount of reported chemical usage, were the same in 1995 as in 1994. The total amount used by all five was very nearly the same for both years, and accounted for about one-half of all agricultural pesticide use. The top five crops by amount reportedly used is shown in Table 1 (on page 3). As shown in the table, pesticide use in cotton was up by 17% over the previous year, reflecting both a 9% increase in cotton acreage as well as a

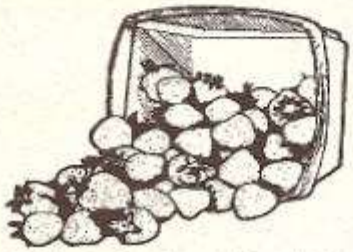
(see **PESTICIDE USE** *on page 3)*

Reported Agricultural Pesticide Use
California, million pounds



(**UFW** *from page 1)*

In addition to public education endeavors, as many as three dozen UFW organizers are continuing their efforts to garner the support of strawberry workers in California's Central Coast production region centered in Watsonville. Though the growing season in the area ended with the arrival of winter rains and many pickers returned to Mexico for the holiday season, organizers are laying the groundwork for Spring 1997 when the new season begins.



Industry leaders claim that most strawberry workers don't want the union. Last August an estimated 5,000 to 7,000 growers and workers marched through Watsonville under the banner of the Pro-Worker Committee to express their opposition to the UFW. On its part, the union has also organized successful marches, bringing thousands of its supporters to the streets of the town.

The two sides in the organizing campaign are deeply divided, and it appears that neither is willing to compromise. Meanwhile, a new season is now underway with shipments from Southern California strawberry growing districts beginning to arrive in markets just as the new year begins. But there are no signs of union organizing in these Southern California fields. All of the UFW's resources are concentrated in the Watsonville-Salinas district. Organizing in the fields will begin this spring with the start of the new season.

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Table 1
Top Five Crops by Amount of Reported Pesticide Use, California, 1995 & 1994 (million pounds)

Crop	Amount, 1995	Amount, 1994
grapes, table & raisin	31.8	30.7
grapes, wine	27.0	27.5
cotton	17.7	15.1
almonds	12.0	14.4
tomatoes, processing	11.7	12.4

Source: Department of Pesticide Regulation, Summary of Pesticide Use Report Data: Indexed by Commodity, 1995 and 1994.

(**PESTICIDE USE**, *from page 2)*

particularly bad pest problem in the crop during 1995.

The only major commodities for which there were significant reductions in annual reported pesticide use were almonds and sugar beets. In almonds the year-to-year decline was 16%. While the total of bearing and non-bearing almond acreage actually expanded during 1995, the crop had a very bad year due to untimely late winter and early spring rains that destroyed much of the bloom, sharply reducing crop yields.

In sugar beets the decrease was 21%. However, acreage also fell, down by 18%. Thus, the decline in acreage could account for nearly all of the reduced pesticide use.

As in the case of commodities, there was little year-to-year change in the leading chemicals, as ranked by amount of use. Sulfur, an organic chemical which can be used in organic farming, continues to be the most important pesticide in California agriculture. Sulfur tops the list of pesticides by amount of reported use, followed by petroleum oil, methyl bromide, metam-sodium, and glyphosate. These five chemicals accounted for 59% of all reported pesticide use in the state in 1994.

What these data show is that pesticide use in California agriculture continues to increase, reflecting a strong dependence of farm production on chemicals. There is no indication in the data that increased consumer interest in organically grown food products or sustainable farm practices has yet had any effect on total chemical use. Year-to-year changes in the total amount of pest control materials applied to specific crops are evidently mainly determined by changes in planted crop acreage or other major external factors such as weather.

Resources: Veda Federighi, California Department of Pesticide Regulation, 1020 N Street, Sacramento, CA 95814, Phone (916) 445-3974.

- The 1995 Summary of Pesticide Use Report Data, is available in two volumes, indexed by chemical or by commodity. Send $10 for each volume to: Cashier, California Department of Pesticide Regulation, 1020 N Street, Sacramento, CA 95814-5624.

- To obtain information about purchasing the full computerized data base of the individual use reports, call the DPR Information Systems Branch, at (916) 445-4110.

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