

# Union-News • Sunday Republican.

## Pesticide use down in state

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Source:

*Union-News (Springfield, Mass.)*

Saturday, 07/14/2001

Edition: All, Section: NEWS, Page B01

Dateline: AMHERST

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Farmers in Massachusetts were wary of making changes, but now they implement the program's suggestions more than any other New England state.

AMHERST - In the 20 years since the UMass Extension service has been working with Massachusetts farmers to find alternative ways to protect their crops, pesticide usage for some crops is down by as much as 50 percent.

The Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program, formed in 1978, looks at all available methods for controlling pests, as alternatives to simply carpet bombing the field with a multitude of chemicals, said program director William M. Coli. Alternatives include crop rotation, the use of natural enemies to control pests, and employing the least disruptive chemicals but only when needed.

Coli said farmers were initially reluctant to bet the farm on the recommendations of UMass strangers. After farmers began to realize the economic and environmental benefits, the program began to bear fruit.

The use of pesticides on corn is down by half, on apples by 40 percent, and on cranberries and strawberries by 25 percent each, he said.

"Massachusetts growers have been in the forefront of adapting IPM in New England," Coli said. The problem with insecticides is they can also wipe out any natural enemies that would help control the pest, he said.

The pest often returns but with natural predators wiped out, the pest is allowed to run unchecked.

"When you use pesticides, you get on a 'pesticide treadmill.' If you spray pesticides, you will need more pesticides, you'll need stronger pesticides and you'll need greater doses," Coli said.

Bradley C. Mitchell, director of pesticide services for the Massachusetts Department of Food and Agriculture, said the reduction in chemical use has not come at the expense of the health of crops.

IPM, which receives funding from Food and Agriculture, has stressed that chemicals should be used only when necessary, he said. In the past, no one considered the effect of the pesticides, he said." It was "Today is Thursday, let's spray."

Thomas C. Clark of Clarkdale Fruit Farm in Deerfield, whose family has operated a farm since 1915, said that in the last 15 years the farm has greatly reduced the use of chemicals that hurt the environment.

"When I came into (farming) 25 to 30 years ago, you still had chemical sales agents coming around and recommending what you needed to spray." he said. "Every two weeks or every time it rained, you'd spray." Today Clark said the crops are closely monitored for the presence of insects or disease, "And we treat what we need to do with less invasive chemicals."

In recent years the program has evolved from working directly with farmers to training people who go to work as private consultants for area farmers, Coli said.

He said Massachusetts's farms are responsible for more than 75 percent of the apple and cranberry crops use advice from IPM consultants trained at UMass.