

Biopesticides not just for organic farming

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Biopesticides are not just for organic farming any more. Then again, they never have been.

Pam Marrone, a longtime leader in the biopesticide industry, told the 1,200 people at the California Association of Pest Control Advisers (CAPCA) annual conference in Reno, Nev., that 80 percent of currently available biopesticides are used in conventional agriculture today.

Biopesticides are good for organic production, but they are not just for organics, she said.

Marrone is CEO and founder of Marrone Bio Innovations, a company of 40 she started in 2006 to discover and develop natural products for pest and weed control. She founded Agra Quest in 1996, serving as its CEO until March 2006.

Marrone has two new products now registered and six in the pipeline.

Marrone said when she started speaking on biopesticides, people would often leave the room. No one left in Reno as she relayed how many of the major companies are now developing and marketing biopesticides.

She described biopesticides as non-toxic compounds to control pests. They are developed from such things as plant extracts and fatty acids. They can also be pheromones and plant growth regulators.

They are the fastest growing segment of the agchem industry. There are more biopesticides going through the Environmental Protection Agency registration process than conventional pesticides, she said.

Biopesticides worldwide sales are expected to total \$1 billion next year, still small compared to the \$35 billion in the worldwide pesticide market.

Many of the major pesticide manufacturers are jumping into the biopesticide industry. She cited several, including BASF, which recently entered into a distribution agreement with Marrone's old company, Agra Quest, for distribution of a biofungicide, Serenade.

This wider recognition of biopesticides is partly in response to major food buyers like Sysco, Wal-Mart and McDonald's requesting suppliers use sustainable agricultural practices.

The growing issue with maximum residue levels (MRLs) on exported American commodities is also increasing interest in biopesticides.

Marrone told the California pest control advisers that it takes only 12 to 18 months to win biopesticide registrations through EPA. She heads a trade organization that totals 50 companies involved in biopesticides.

Surveys have told Marrone and others in the industry that PCAs have a more positive perception of biopesticides. However, they still doubt their efficacy compared to conventional chemistry.

While many biopesticides can be used alone, she said they also are probably more effective for resistance management programs as alternatives in rotation with other chemistry. They work well in early season, low pest pressure situations.

She said the wrong approach to using biopesticides is to turn to them after you've thrown everything but the kitchen sink at a problem and nothing else works.

They are particularly appealing if a PCA or grower wants to use a pest control product with a short pre-harvest interval or if there is a critical need for workers to return to the field quickly after a pest control application.

She predicted rapid growth in new biopesticides on the market in the next two to five years.

She also cited her company's sponsorship of the first online continuing education course on biopesticides developed with Farm Press/Penton Ag Media. It is available on the [Marrone Bio Innovations](#) Web site; as well as the Web sites for [Western Farm Press](#); and [CAPCA](#).

email: hcline@farmpress.com

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