
No. 3/91
February 1, 1991

WINE TRADE DISRUPTION SOLVED

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) today proposed an interim tolerance level for procymidone, a fungicide widely used outside the U.S. to prevent the growth of mold on wine grapes. If approved, the measure could end an almost year-old ban on imports of certain wines from the European Community and other countries in early March.

The new tolerance level would apply to all grapes treated with procymidone before January 1, 1990 as long as they contain no more than 7 ppm (parts per million) of the fungicide.

This initiative would help restore exports of E.C. vintage wines to the U.S. to the normal level. Trade has been severely disrupted since February 1990 when U.S. officials discovered traces of the chemical in samples and began rejecting shipments on the grounds that procymidone is not on EPA's list of approved pesticides. This action may have cost E.C. exporters up to \$200 million in lost sales out of the normal annual trade with the U.S. worth close to \$1 billion.

E.C. Agriculture Commissioner Ray MacSharry welcomed EPA's decision, saying he was confident the measure would greatly help to resolve the wine trade problem. He also thanked the EPA for its quick response to E.C. representations.

Procymidone is widely approved throughout the world for use on selected fruit and vegetables to combat damp-related botrytis, or "noble rot", when it affects wine grapes. It has been in use for 10 years in the E.C. where independent scientists and national regulatory authorities say it is safe for use and does not pose a health risk.

Procymidone had not been approved in the U.S. since most domestic wine producing areas are not affected by the dampness that could require its application. Approval for its use in the U.S. was not sought by the Japanese manufacturer Sumitomo Chemical Company until May 1990 after imported wines containing traces of the chemical were already being turned away.

In the absence of a regulated tolerance, the U.S. authorities began conducting the necessary investigative procedures in March 1990. Since then, around 1,000 samples of imported wines entering the U.S. have been analyzed, of which under 100 were found to contain traces of the fungicide. A higher proportion of E.C. exporters would have been affected had they not switched shipments and other markets where possible.

In the future, the E.C. Commission and the EPA services responsible for regulation in pesticides look forward to increased consultation and cooperation, in the spirit of the Transatlantic Declaration, to help avert a repeat of this kind of problem. The Declaration, adopted November 20, 1990 in Paris, lays down the principles and the framework for closer E.C.-U.S. relations and consultation.

Press Contacts: Peter Doyle
(202) 862-9530

Ella Krucoff
(202) 862-9540