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October 19, 2023

Office of Pesticide Programs
Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20460-0001

Re: Herbicide strategy framework, ID EPA-HQ-OPP-2023-0365

To Whom It May Concern:

The Agribusiness Association of Iowa (AAI) exists for the purpose of advocating, communicating, and educating on behalf of a proactive, profitable, and environmentally responsible professional agribusiness industry. AAI's membership consists of almost 200 businesses with over 1,100 locations across the state that supply feed, seed, crop protection products, grain, fertilizer, equipment and additional products and services that benefit agriculture.

Many of our members' locations employ certified commercial pesticide applicators who apply pesticides to their customers' fields. We appreciate the opportunity to submit comments regarding the herbicide strategy framework because we have many concerns on how potential label changes could negatively affect the environment, pest resistance, farm production, and profitability.

The proposed mitigation measures come with costs, complicated record keeping, and confusing responsibilities and liabilities. Conservation practices are not the responsibility of a commercial pesticide applicator who would bear the liability of following a more complicated label. In Iowa, the majority of the cropland is owned by non-operator landowners. Tenant farmers rent the land, often relying on services provided by agribusinesses for crop protection and nutrient management. These are delicate relationships that are important for increasing conservation practices on the land. Label requirements will only complicate these relationships.

Increased costs and complications will discourage the use of herbicides with consequences for the environment. In Iowa, EPA has strongly encouraged our state's development and implementation of the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy to reduce nutrient loss to Iowa waters and the Gulf of Mexico. We have made great progress as a state to reduce tillage and increase cover crop use. If herbicide use is less practical, profitable, or effective, the use of tillage for weed control will increase, leading to increases in soil erosion, phosphorus losses, and greenhouse gas emissions while decreasing soil health and water quality. While cover crops are identified as a mitigation measure, they are usually terminated with herbicides, so the cover crop mitigation measure requires other mitigation measures. Similarly, mitigation measures such as prairie strips utilize herbicides to suppress weed competition during the establishment period of perennial native vegetation.

900 DES MOINES STREET | DES MOINES, IA | 50309-5549
515.262.8323

EPA also strongly encouraged our state's development of the Iowa Pest Resistance Management Program to protect Iowa crops from costly pest resistance. A University of Missouri Extension weed scientist was quoted in an August 25, 2022 Successful Farming article saying:

- When considering herbicides to control of pigweed species like Palmer amaranth, use herbicides with multiple effective modes of action, Bradley says. The most effective programs include residual herbicides applied at full rates prior to soybean planting followed by an additional application of an "overlapping" residual herbicide later in the season.

This recommendation for the most effective program for weed control and resistance management requires multiple modes of action, multiple timings, and at full rates. The EPA's proposed herbicide strategy framework encourages a single mode of action with the fewest points required and at greatly reduced rates.

In order to avoid these unintended impacts, the herbicide strategy needs to refine pesticide use limitation areas, expand exemption options, and expand the mitigation options. Today's GIS technology should be used to refine maps to reduce acres impacted. Registrants and third parties can help speed up map refinements with their models and tools.

Practical exemption options need to be expanded. There are many soil and water conservation programs offered by local, state, and federal agencies and nonprofits. Consultation with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service can help identify these programs. States should be given the opportunity to develop their own certification programs that offer exemptions. In the private sector, technical service providers and certified crop advisers (CCAs) are trusted sources of information for farmers and herbicide applicators. CCAs are required to acquire Continuing Education Units to maintain certification including units for integrated pest management and soil and water management. They can provide adequate plans and timely advice to applicators, but their services are not free.

The list of mitigation options is extremely limited. Expanding mitigation options must be done to provide flexibility for farmers and applicators. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service has identified hundreds of mitigation measures that have credible conservation practice standards maintained by the agency. In just two years, the science team for the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy identified almost 20 practices and evaluated the practices for nitrogen reduction performance. In addition, the team designed a procedure for new practices to be evaluated and recognized for nitrogen or phosphorus reduction. Drones, See & Spray, Drift Sense, and adjuvants and surfactants are just a few examples of rapid technological developments that can reduce herbicide movement. EPA needs to have a process in place to add new mitigation options and continually reevaluate efficacy points for existing mitigation measures.

Training, outreach, and resources will be needed to let farmers and applicators know about the mitigation requirements and how to practically implement the measures for their fields, crops, and growing environments. Weed control is extremely dynamic with weed species, populations, growth habits, weather, crop rotations, and field conditions changing every year. Applicators frequently have

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Plans A, B, and C to deal with potential weed pressures. These plans will have different mitigation requirements with measures like cover crops being implemented nine to ten months before the application of herbicides during the next growing season. Training and outreach will need to be practical and robust to enable applicators' ability to respond to changing growing conditions.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments regarding the herbicide strategy framework and the potential unintended consequences of the potential label changes for our members and their customers. We appreciate EPA's efforts to maintain access to herbicides while complying with the Endangered Species Act.

Sincerely,

Bill Northey
Chief Executive Officer
Agribusiness Association of Iowa

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