



Novak: Mexico heading down EU path on ag restrictions

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Mexico isn't just banning the herbicide glyphosate. It's also violating agreements under the newly enacted U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement and showing signs that the government is following in the footsteps of the European Union and its restrictions on U.S. farm commodities, CropLife America President and CEO Christopher Novak tells

Agri-Pulse

Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's confirmation this week that he would outright ban glyphosate by 2024, together with the country's ongoing failure to approve new pesticide products – some of which have been waiting as long as six years – is ominous for the future of U.S.-Mexico ag trade, Novak said in an interview Friday.

“This is a change in the regulatory philosophy of Mexico at a point in time when we’ve just negotiated a free trade agreement and there’s excitement about working together to ensure the safety of products and a consistent approach to sanitary and phytosanitary measures,” Novak said about proposed ban. “That decision moves us in the wrong direction.”

And it breaks commitments Mexico made under USMCA, Novak said.

“We certainly think the import ban does cross that threshold as violating the sanitary and phytosanitary provisions (of USMCA,” he said.

There are 156 new pesticide products in line for Mexican approval and many more waiting to renew registrations, but the government has been dragging its feet and U.S. companies say they have lost about \$269 million from 2015 through 2019 as their applications languish, said Novak.

“Unfortunately, (Mexico’s Federal Commission for Protection against Sanitary Risk) has virtually ceased processing registrations of new pesticide products and the routine renewal of existing product registrations and has cut off communication with stakeholders,” CropLife America told USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue, U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer, Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross and EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler in an Aug. 7 letter.

But it’s not just the hundred of millions of dollars of trade in pesticides that’s threatened by Mexico’s move towards a European-style “precautionary principle,” the CEO said. It’s also the billions of dollars of U.S. corn, wheat and soybeans that cross the southern border every year.

Glyphosate herbicides like Bayer’s Roundup are popular with U.S. farmers and if Mexico were to begin erecting new restrictions on crops grown with the weed-destroying chemical, the impact would be significant on the U.S. ag sector.

“Our biggest concern, and the reason we’ve pushed this issue so hard, is we want to ensure it does not have an impact on commodity exports to Mexico, like we’re seeing in Europe,” Novak said.

U.S. soybean farmers have used glyphosate herbicides for 40 years, according to the American Soybean Association.

“Glyphosate-tolerant soybeans have enabled soybean farmers to better control weeds and implement no-till and conservation tillage practices that save fuel, reduce erosion, and protect the environment,” ASA said in comments submitted to the EPA in 2018.

The U.S. exported \$2.7 billion worth of corn, \$1.9 billion worth of soybeans and \$811 million worth of wheat to Mexico last year, according to USDA data.

It’s just one of the reasons that the U.S. government is working hard to counter Mexico’s new trajectory. Both the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative and the USDA have been reaching out at the highest levels in Mexican government to convey their concerns, Novak said.



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