

Methyl Bromide

Action Requested: Florida Farm Bureau requests Congress to fund research into alternatives to Methyl Bromide.

Background: The need for the continued use of Methyl Bromide as a crop protection tool is of critical importance to Florida agricultural production, and the United States at large. It is estimated that the loss of Methyl Bromide would have a \$1 billion impact on the U.S. winter vegetable industry, with Florida accounting for nearly all of this impact.

Methyl Bromide plays a critical role in the production, handling, processing, distribution and storage of our nation's agricultural commodities by controlling a wide variety of dangerous plant pests and diseases. Continued use of Methyl Bromide is imperative to the protection of our food supply and agricultural production in the U.S. To date methyl bromide is the most effective fumigant to kill weeds, nematodes and soil-borne diseases, and banning its use would be detrimental to Florida agriculture, especially our fruit and vegetable producers.

Under the terms of the Clean Air Act and pursuant to the Montreal Protocol, an international agreement designed to protect the stratospheric ozone layer, Methyl Bromide use is being phased out in the United States. In 1987 various countries agreed to phase out use of methyl bromide use by 2005 in developed countries and 2015 in developing countries if technically and economically feasible alternatives could be developed by that time. A complete phase out for the United States was scheduled for January 1, 2005. Our major trading partners including Mexico and China, considered developing nations, may continue the use of Methyl Bromide for ten years after the scheduled phase out in this nation.

While the U.S. Department of Agriculture has invested over \$100 million to conduct extensive research on alternatives to Methyl Bromide, at the present time no technologically and economically feasible alternatives have been found. In March an intergovernmental meeting on the Montreal Protocol granted limited "critical use exemptions" to 11 developed countries facing a year-end deadline for phasing out methyl bromide. This action will allow farmers in the United States an additional year to use the compound.

Methyl bromide remains an essential compound for important crops such as tomatoes, strawberries, melons, peppers, cucumbers and flowers in Florida. Since the phase out period began in 1992, additional data has been developed indicating that the magnitude of the impact of the chemical on the restoration of the ozone layer is not as significant as it was initially thought to be and may, in fact, be negligible.

Unless viable alternatives are found, Florida farmers and other users will be at a disadvantage when competing with agricultural products produced in developing countries where methyl bromide will continue to be available for several years after the U.S. phase out. Congress must redouble its efforts to fund research into alternatives to Methyl Bromide. If we are not successful in this effort then we will be forced with three choices: request additional production under the critical use exemption process, accept the loss of Methyl Bromide and request Congress for legislative relief. Remaining profitable in farming without Methyl Bromide is not possible. Congress and the President are our last line of defense.



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