Sarah Aird

Please find attached comments from the statewide coalition Californians for Pesticide Reform on DPR's proposed SPM pesticide prioritization process.

Californians For Pesticide Reform
Californianos para la Reforma de los Pesticidas

May 8, 2025

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RE: DPR's Proposed SPM Pesticide Prioritization Process

Dear Director Morrison and Deputy Director Teerlink,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the Department of Pesticide Regulation's proposed pesticide prioritization process. These comments are submitted on behalf of Californians for Pesticide Reform, a statewide coalition founded in 1996 to protect public health, improve environmental quality and support a sustainable and just agricultural system by building a diverse movement across California to change statewide and local pesticide policies and practices. CPR works in and with farmworker communities around the state to reduce hazardous agricultural pesticide use, and our more than 200 member organizations that support these efforts range from public health, children's health, educational and environmental advocates to clean air and water organizations to health practitioners, environmental justice groups and labor organizations to farmers and sustainable agriculture advocates.

In 2023, California published *Accelerating Sustainable Pest Management: A Roadmap for California* to help transition growers from wide-scale use of hazardous pesticides toward safer, more resilient, ecologically-based agriculture. Developed by a cross-sector working group led by DPR, CDFA, and CalEPA, the Roadmap sets a "North Star" goal of eliminating Priority Pesticides by 2050 and making sustainable pest management the de facto pest management system in California.

While this is a promising and much-needed step, many community members and advocates from agricultural regions are concerned that the proposed pace of implementation is too slow and too focused on unnecessarily cumbersome review processes rather than meaningful on-the-ground change. To meet the 2050 North Star goals and ensure the protection of human health, ecosystems, and farm viability well into the future, California must accelerate the transition with clear timelines, implementation of systems-level alternative practices, and stronger state support for farmers transitioning to more sustainable practices.

I. Align Pesticide Prioritization & Actions with the SPM Roadmap's 2050 North Star Goals

To achieve meaningful pesticide reductions and build public support for the Roadmap, all aspects of implementation – including the entire pesticide prioritization process – must be clearly connected to the 2050 North Star goals. Clear, strict timelines for completion of risk assessments and reevaluations, in addition to timelines for mitigation actions that lead to use reductions, need to be adopted as soon as possible. Every proposed step, including interim milestones, timelines for reduction, and concrete actions to assist growers in transitioning away from high-risk pesticide use should have a clear, explicit link to the long-term goals of eliminating the use of all Priority Pesticides in California by 2050 and making sustainable pest management the de facto pest management system by 2050. Lack of specificity in how actions today will result in the 2050 pesticide elimination goals will undermine the credibility of the plan.

Moreover, growers deserve clarity, predictability and support in this transition. Timelines shouldn't just include expected assessments of risk and implementation of mitigations but must be accompanied by timelines reflecting how DPR is adjusting internal budgets and staffing to support farmer transition to more sustainable farming practices. DPR's pesticide prioritization timelines and actions should be grounded in broader cross-agency timelines and milestones, including how the Department is collaborating with sister departments and agencies across the state to support growers through this process, including with technical assistance for transition, bridge funding, crop insurance reform, and training in ecological practices. Giving farmers certainty and support can help drive early behavior change and the adoption of less harmful practices, even before regulations are finalized.

II. Prioritize Action over Re-Identification of Priority Pesticides

DPR's current focus on identifying and prioritizing hazardous pesticides on an individual basis (represented primarily on Slides 13-15 of DPR's workshop presentation) threatens to significantly delay progress. California already has access to scientifically-vetted and prioritized lists of the most harmful agricultural pesticides. Rather than reinventing the wheel, DPR should begin with already-available, trusted lists and shift efforts toward reducing use and supporting alternatives. We recommend DPR adopt as a baseline starting point those chemicals already filtered for hazard and volatility and prioritized by the California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA)[1] on page 84 of the *CalEnviroScreen 4.0 report* (https://oehha.ca.gov/media/downloads/calenviroscreen/report/calenviroscreen40reportf2021.pdf).

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[1] OEHHA's process for filtering for Hazard and Volatility (from Page 83 of *CalEnviroscreen 4.0 report*):

"Pesticide Use – Filter for Hazard and Volatility

Specific pesticides included in the measure of pesticide use were identified from DPR's 2018 list of pesticides active ingredients by pounds used in California through consideration of both hazard and likelihood of exposure.

Potentially hazardous pesticides were identified using a list generated under the Birth Defect Prevention Act of 1984 (SB 950) and the Proposition 65 list (Safe Drinking Water and Toxic Enforcement Act of 1986). As part of a review process of active ingredients under the SB 950 program, pesticides were classified as "High", "Moderate", or "Low" priority in 2011 for potential adverse health effects using studies of sufficient quality to characterize risk.

We are also concerned by the proposal to address a maximum of only eight pesticides per year for assessment and mitigation. DPR already has a large backlog of pesticides for which assessments were never completed and/or effective mitigations implemented. With approximately 1,000 active ingredients and thousands of pesticide products approved for use in California, the proposed pace is far too slow. At this rate the process could take hundreds of years to eliminate use of Priority Pesticides in California. Of equal concern, the current process, as described, allows for *no* action in any given year. That's unacceptable.

In addition to recommending that DPR adopt OEHHA's already scientifically-vetted pesticide list as a starting point, we urge DPR to group and collectively prioritize for reductions similar or similarly-used pesticides rather than evaluate them on a case by case basis. For example, grouping them by shared modes of action, such as neurotoxic pesticides (e.g., organophosphates and other cholinesterase-inhibiting pesticides, pyrethroids, neonicotinoids), could make the process far more efficient. Similarly, focusing on particularly hazardous classes of pesticides and/or more drift-prone application methods, such as fumigation, aerial spraying and air-blast spraying that pose serious health risks, would allow DPR to address the most harmful exposures first. Any pesticides under consideration for listing should be publicized and all Priority Pesticides should be tracked for reduction trends using PUR data.

III. "Feasible Alternatives" Cannot be Part of the Decision Tree for Determining Priority Pesticides or for Moving Forward with Actions to Restrict Usage of Priority Pesticides

A critical issue is how "feasible alternatives" are defined and used in the prioritization process. Whether or not feasible alternative practices or products exist for any particular Priority Pesticide or Priority Pesticide use should not be part of the decision-making prioritization tree. Identifying a lack of feasible alternatives cannot justify continued use of any Priority Pesticide but rather could be used as a rationale to direct state funding to support farmers through efforts

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For SB 950, the prioritization of each pesticide is a subjective process based upon the nature and number of potential adverse effects, the number of species affected, the no observable effect level (NOEL), potential human exposure, use patterns, quantity used, and US EPA evaluations and actions, among others. Proposition 65 requires the state to maintain a list of chemicals that cause cancer or reproductive toxicity. Pesticides on the Proposition 65 list as of March 2020 were evaluated. For the purpose of developing an exposure indicator, pesticides that were prioritized as "Low," not prioritized under SB 950, or not on the Proposition 65 list were removed from the analysis.

The analysis was further limited to pesticides of high or moderate volatility. Higher volatility was considered to increase the likelihood of exposures. A list of pesticide volatilities was obtained from DPR. Pesticides not appearing on this list were researched for chemical properties in PubChem and the open literature. Pesticides with volatility less than 10-6 mm Hg were removed from the indicator analysis.

Additionally, pesticides that did not make the hazard and volatility criteria, but that are listed as Toxic Air Contaminants (TACs) or restricted active ingredients based on DPR's, TAC or restricted use lists were also included in the analysis. The DPR lists of restricted materials and TACs are available at:
https://www.cdpr.ca.gov/docs/enforce/permitting.htm
https://www.cdpr.ca.gov/docs/emon/pubs/tac/tac_prog.htm
See the figure below for a flow chart on how pesticide active ingredients were selected for inclusion.

The filtering of pesticides for both hazard and volatility resulted in a list of 147 pesticides, of which 132 had agricultural use during this time. These 132 were included in the analysis here. The pesticides that are included in the indicator calculation are identified below."

such as bridge financing, insurance backstops, additional research and/or technical transition support.

Too often "feasible alternatives" refer only to another set of chemical substitutes – *products* that replace one pesticide with another – rather than encompassing more ecologically-based *practices* that help create conditions that prevent and minimize pest problems. Many California farmers are already proving that it's feasible and profitable to grow every crop in California without use of the most hazardous pesticides through more ecologically-based farming, such as certified organic or agroecological practices. California has a robust organic farming community, with more certified organic farms than in any other state.[2] Instead of only evaluating new alternative products, DPR should work with sister governmental entities and groups like CCOF, CalCAN, CAFF and Wild Farm Alliance to leverage support for whole-systems farming approaches that eliminate pest-conducive conditions and effectively prevent or minimize pest and disease problems. Practices like crop rotation, cover cropping, intercropping, and habitat diversification are not only feasible but also beneficial to long-term soil health, erosion reduction and water retention, farming system productivity, and economic viability. These methods, already used successfully in organic and agroecological farming, should be recognized as the standard, not the exception when planning the state's future pest management strategy.

IV. Suggestions for the Composition of the Pesticide Prioritization Committee

The proposed composition of the committee[3] is a good start but leaves a number of important gaps. Here are some additional recommendations with respect to the composition of the committee:

- We want to reiterate the critical importance of ensuring that no one with financial ties to pesticide production or sales sit on the committee and that this restriction is explicit.
- We support inclusion of agricultural and urban practitioners, academic experts, environmental toxicologists, and public health professionals on the committee, but we urge DPR to refine these categories further and ensure that among these categories there are multiple experts in ecological crop and soil management, such as farmers with organically-certified farms who utilize regenerative practices or farmers using agroecological practices.
- In addition, we support inclusion of other relevant experts in areas such as entomology, wildlife or conservation biology, soil health and microbiology.
- We also recommend adding an additional position for a public health clinician with pesticide expertise.

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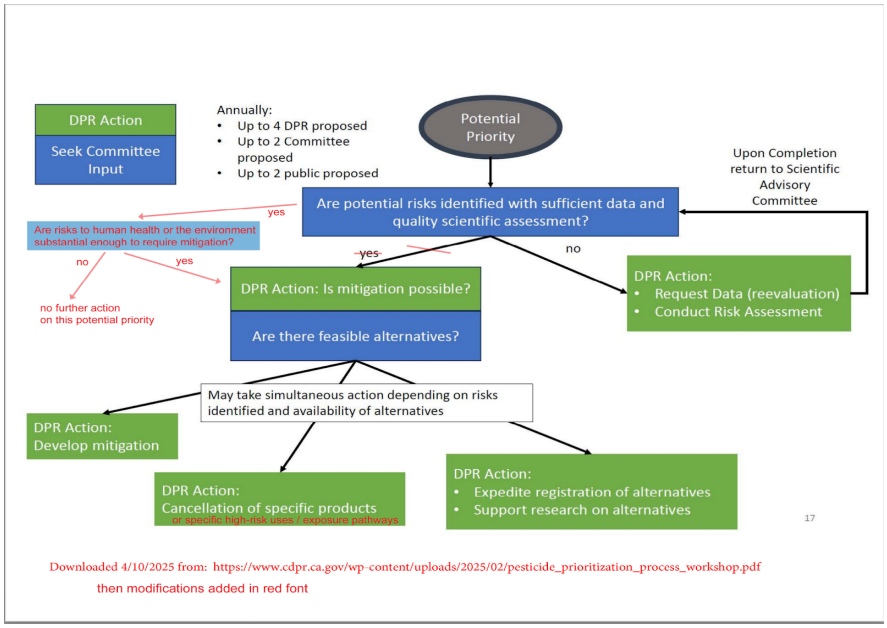
[2] Nicholas Babin, Jet Tan, Sarah P. Church & Brennan Radulski (04 Mar 2025): "Systemic change or input substitution? The impact of the Healthy Soils Program on agroecological transitions within California Food Systems", *Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems*, https://doi.org/10.1080/21683565.2025.2472770.

[3] 1) Ag Practitioner, 2) Urban Practitioner, 3) Urban academic extension, 4) Ag academic extension, 5) Pest Expert, 6) Environmental Expertise (e.g., toxicologist, ecologist, environmental scientist), 7) Traditional Ecological Knowledge, 8) Public Health Expertise (e.g., human health toxicologist, farmworker expertise), 9) Public Drinking Water or Wastewater Utilities, 10) Human Health toxicologist, 11) Ecotoxicologist

- With respect to the first bullet point under “Baseline Expertise” on Slide 19 - “Demonstrated scientific credentials and disciplinary expertise in relevant fields”: we believe it should state “Demonstrated scientific credentials and/or disciplinary expertise in relevant fields”. It is important to have members with demonstrated scientific credentials, but it is also important to have people on the committee with disciplinary expertise who may not have “demonstrated scientific credentials” as described, so we urge DPR to make it clear that both types of candidates are eligible to be on the committee.
- With respect to the second bullet point under “Baseline Expertise” on Slide 19 - “Demonstrated ability to work constructively and effectively on scientific committees”: we believe this requirement should be re-written so it doesn’t limit eligible candidates to only those people who have previously served on a scientific committee.
- In order to ensure engagement with the most directly-impacted communities, there should be a clearly-defined, two-way communication link between this committee and DPR’s Environmental Justice Advisory Committee, also currently under formation.

V. The Risk Management Process Must Include Public Input

DPR's proposed pesticide prioritization process indicates that public input will help select which pesticides are evaluated (Slide 17). However, DPR has not indicated that the public will also participate in risk management decisions—such as determining what level of health or environmental harm is significant enough to trigger mitigation. These are crucial decisions. The process must not rely solely on internal agency judgment. We urge DPR to revise Slide 17 in line with our revisions below to show public involvement in the risk management phase—just as it does for prioritization. That phase should be colored blue, and include an "off-ramp" for non-prioritized pesticides. While DPR must follow statutory requirements, the process must be transparent and open to meaningful input—especially where risk thresholds are subjective.



VI. Building the Infrastructure and Landscape Conditions for Success

To realize the goal of sustainable pest management, California must invest in infrastructure. DPR should work with other agencies, research institutions, and local communities to expand extension services, technical support, and early detection systems. Risk-based crop insurance should reward ecological practices, while programs like the Healthy Soils and Biologically Integrated Farming System programs must be scaled up and tracked for results as part of a coordinated statewide strategy. Early adopters should be incentivized, and those transitioning should receive needed support. The goal should not be the eradication of pests, but the prevention of pest and disease problems through resilient farming systems. Healthy soils, diverse cropping systems, and habitat-rich landscapes naturally suppress pest outbreaks. Transitioning to ecologically-based farming yields countless co-benefits: improved air and water quality, improved community health, richer wildlife habitat, better carbon sequestration, greater resiliency, and continued profitability.

The SPM Roadmap is bold and necessary—but only if backed by timely action, systemic change, and real accountability. California can lead the nation by prioritizing prevention, embracing ecologically-based practices, and aligning resources with the urgency of our environmental and public health challenges. The path to eliminating hazardous pesticides lies not in slow deliberation, but in bold, coordinated action that prioritizes human health, ecological resilience, and long-term agricultural sustainability.

Thank you for the public opportunity to weigh in on this important process.

Respectfully,

Sarah C. Aird
Policy Director