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DDT Hearings Stir USDA

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Top scientists of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) were concerned greatly with the DDT hearings in Madison according to testimony released Thursday.

Dr. G. W. Irving Jr., administrator of the Agricultural Research Service, told a House Appropriations subcommittee that if Wisconsin should find that DDT is a pollutant it would nullify the use of DDT in the state.

This decision is now in the hands of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources which has hundreds of pages of testimony and a stack of evidence on which to base its finding. The Madison hearings ended Wednesday after nearly 30 days of testimony.

Irving noted that the major question of the Madison hearings concerned runoff pollution and the problems it could cause in Lake Michigan and in other waterways.

"Perhaps the major part of the damage caused by these agricultural chemicals is due to accidents and to misuse, rather than to the trace amounts we are talking about," he continued.

"At the stage of our scientific capacity today it is impossible to bring conclusive evidence to bear on either one side of the other of this controversy. One of the questions is this: even though the minute amounts of these chemicals in your food are not going to kill you, what about your children and your children's children?" he continued.

Irving said that the answer "is most imponderable, but is being played up for a fair-thee-well by the people who oppose the use of these chemicals (DDT)."

Rep. Jamie L. Whitten (D-Miss.) complained that the public was going overboard on the matter of pollution and as a result every department and agency in government was using the issue to get more money and to stir up more projects.

Whitten, subcommittee chairman, noted that sediment is a pollutant in water, but "the whole Mississippi Valley was formed with pollution before we came over here when the dirt washed away from the hillsides."

With all the pollution hysteria, according to Whitten, it is a little like hanging of the witches at Salem.

Irving answered, quickly, that the witches at Salem were not hanged, but were burned. "With the present anti-pollution laws, (the Department) of Health, Education, and Welfare wouldn't let them do it now."

Dr. R. J. Anderson, associate to Irving, referred to the pending release of the study made by the National Academy of Sciences on the amount of persistant pesticides in the environment and what it means in relation to hazards to public health, agriculture, to fish and wildlife. The study also was concerned with alternate methods of pest control, such as the organophosphates, a class of chemicals that do not last as long as DDT, but are more dangerous because they are more potent.

Anderson said that the report from the academy was expected during May and the Agriculture Department then would have "an evaluation to what it means before taking action one way or another on possible elimination of these pesticides."

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