



MISSISSIPPI FARM BUREAU® FEDERATION

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February 27, 2019

Cynthia Martinez
Department of Interior, NWRS Chief
1849 C. Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Re: Use of Genetically Modified Crops (GMO) on National Wildlife Refuges (NWR) in Mississippi

Chief Martinez,

On August 2, 2018, Deputy Director Gregory Sheehan issued a memorandum withdrawing the July 17, 2014 memorandum that would phase out the use of GMO crops and neonicotinoid pesticides on National Wildlife Refuges. We applaud this decision. GMO crops have been used since 1996, been studied extensively, and been approved for use by both the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). GMO crops have allowed an increase in production on fewer acres, while utilizing fewer inputs and have consistently been shown to be safe for use. While we would have preferred a blanket withdrawal, Director Sheehan allowed NWR to determine the appropriate use of GMOs on a case-by-case basis.

It has come to our attention that some NWRs in Mississippi are not allowing GMO crops to be used in their Cooperative Agricultural Agreements (CAAs). We find this disappointing and hope you will assist in correcting this issue. Most of our NWRs are in the Mississippi Delta, where over 95 percent of all soybeans and corn planted are GMOs. They provide an abundance of protein and carbohydrates for overwinter wildlife and waterfowl. Our environment is conducive to substantial insect and weed pressure, making GMO crops essential. Conventional crops require a more intensive approach including an increase in the use of insecticides, herbicides, and cultivation. The NWR rules currently in place (i.e. the ban on Atrazine) are a deterrent to the use of conventional crops making it difficult for producers to enter into CAAs.

More importantly, the stance some NWR managers take is in direct conflict with the sound science behind the use of GMOs and is contrary to the opinion of USDA and EPA. Those agencies have found repeatedly that GMOs are safe for use, important for conservation, and do not pose human health risks. We feel it is important for all agencies to be in agreement, and it sends a poor message when one agency disagrees with the heavily supported sound science developed by the controlling agencies.

Sincerely,

Mike McCormick, President