

## **MAPAQ aims for pesticide reduction**

by Hugh Maynard

Quebec farmers will be asked to participate in a program aimed at reducing the use of pesticides in the province's agriculture by half by the year 2000.

Announced by Delegate Minister of Agriculture, Yvon Vallières, in mid-September, the program will direct \$2.5 million in new funding towards controlling plant pests through non-chemical means.

"The days of spraying just as an insurance are over," Vallières said in underlining the environmental need for agriculture to be more responsible in its use of pesticides.

Quebec farmers presently spend less per treated hectare on pesticides than any other province and 67% less than the US, according to ministry figures (\$30/ha in Quebec versus \$49/ha in Ontario, as an example.) Two-thirds of pesticides are herbicides and one in three herbicides is used in corn production.

The comparatively low usage of pesticides in Quebec is partly attributable to the winter climate which helps to reduce the incidences of disease and pest infestation.

The greatest environmental problem with pesticides has been the contamination of water courses and subsequent effects on plant and animal wildlife.

Launched during Resource Conservation Week, the program is called "Stratégie phytosanitaire" (Plant Protection Strategy) and will be based on four main components:

- plant protection research services;
- pest detection early warning network;
- public and private agricultural advisors
- private inspection services.

The research component will be focused on developing ways of non-chemical pest control. Additional advisor positions will be created in the agricultural areas surrounding Montreal, where 70% of the pesticides in Quebec are applied.

Extra resources will also be provided for production clubs and detection networks, as well as \$1.13 million in assistance for farms that reduce the amount of pesticides used.

There will also be adult and distance education courses offered in the future on how to achieve a more rational use of pesticides on the farm.

Jean-Yves Couillard, 2nd Vice-president of the Union des producteurs agricoles (UPA), said that agricultural production has been going up by 5% per year even though farmers have been adjusting to the need for more resource and environmental protection.

He added that farmers have been accepting the challenge and are more accepting of the risk of reduced results while realizing benefit from less direct expenses in producing acceptable yields.

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