

# The Grim Dimensions of a 2,4-D World

by ERIC HERM

Organic farming isn't easy on any scale. Neither is conventional farming. But as more varieties of GMO crops dominate fields across America, their invasion does not halt at the turning row.

This year alone, our family farm will potentially lose tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of dollars due to Roundup and 2,4-D herbicide drift. That is in one growing season. My expectations and hopes of growing a healthy, bountiful organic or non-GMO cotton crop in the near future are slowly fading.

When I first heard of the 2,4-D GMO line of crops in their experimental phases at Dow Chemical, I seriously thought they would never make it to market. But as I walked across our 13 different fields of cotton (covering more than 6,700 acres) this past summer, I saw firsthand the initial wave of 2,4-D drift damage: scattered plants wilted with deformed leaves, less than one-third the size of what they should be.

There were several trial plots of the 2,4-D gene-resistant (dicamba) cotton scattered all over the panhandle of West Texas this season. Where exactly? I don't know. And it doesn't matter. In the coming days, it is practically a done deal the EPA will give the final green light to Dow, Monsanto and every other biotech giant to sell dicamba-resistant cotton this year, while soy and corn will follow in 2016.

You see, Roundup doesn't cut it anymore. Not on "superweeds." One county north of our farm, Dawson County, has many irrigation farmers chomping at the bit to get their hands on this stuff. Their weeds have outsmarted the Roundup. Early reports reveal those same

weeds will resist both dicamba and 2,4-D three times as fast. The rest of us and our bodies? Your child's immune system? Your unborn children and grandchildren? Well, that is another story.

Oh, did I fail to mention trees, grasses, gardens, vineyards and pretty much all broad-leaf plants are impacted by dicamba and 2,4-D and may even die if enough drift occurs? Not to mention the ramifications on lakes, rivers, wildlife, livestock, insects and the entire cycle of life. Apparently life is so easy to forget these days when you're trying to get rid of these pesky weeds.

Not everyone knows 2,4-D was a key ingredient in Agent Orange – the same chemical our government and armed services utilized to kill food crops and defoliate the dense jungles during the Vietnam War more than 40 years ago. It's the same chemical that still causes major deformities among newborns because so much of the dangerous chemical lingers in the soil.

Call me old-fashioned or naïve, but as a fourth-generation farmer I still thought it was part of our job, our obligation, to be a steward of the land, a caretaker of the soil. But now, our industry has completely transformed us into good little soldiers of the chemical companies peddling products and lies since World War I. We're nothing more than chemical-heads using and abusing what our dealer is pushing on the local corner.

As an organic and non-GMO farmer, I am fearful of what our vocation has become, not what it will become, but what it is right now. The outlook is grim. But I wonder how many of us actually pause to

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## OPINION

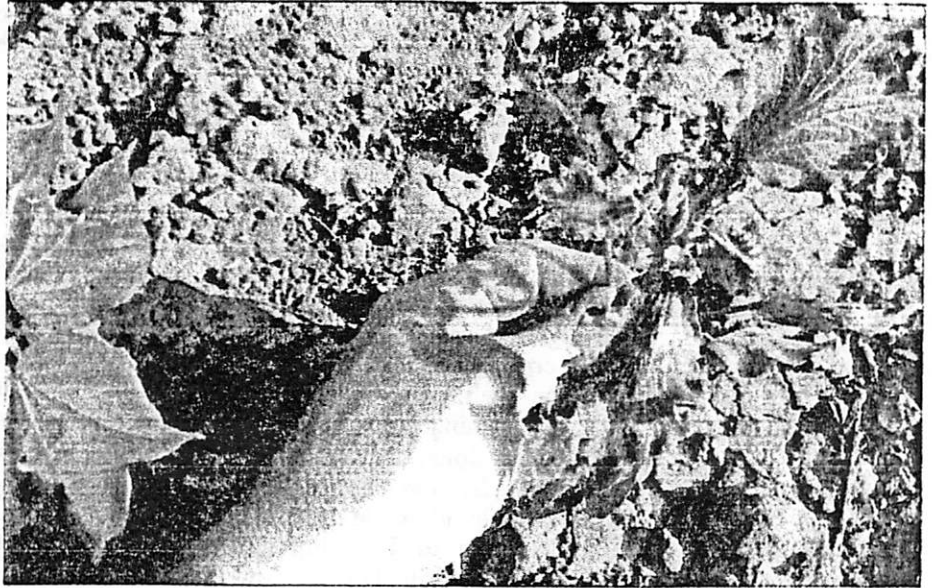
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think about what we are doing to the land, ourselves, posterity and the rest of the environment?

As I watched GMO cotton crops thrive all around me until severe drought conditions last August, I struggled with how I will continue to fight chemical drift. With Roundup herbicide, the drift will usually subside within 1 mile, but with 2,4-D in our 20 mph-plus winds in the spring and early summer, we are talking 40-50 miles of drift, perhaps more.

Each year, over 165 million acres (roughly the size of Texas) is sprayed with Roundup in this country, and we are going to exchange a very toxic herbicide for a much more volatile one in 2,4-D. I don't see how any organic or conventional crop will be safe from this direct assault. In fact, I don't see how any of us will be safe breathing Agent Orange a couple of months each year – not to mention we'll all be eating food with 2,4-D in its genetic makeup. Yeah, what could possibly go wrong with this scenario?

While Europe continues to distance itself from GMOs and dangerous chemicals, we continue to embrace them in the United States. A few countries like Brazil, Argentina, India and Canada continue to follow our lead, accounting for another 212 million acres of GMO crops. In Brazil and Argentina, they destroy vital ecosystems of rainforests to plant genetically modified soy in its place for grazing cattle.



Deformed leaves in farmer Eric Herm's field.

Our commodity corporate farming system is broken. Most farmers are farming far more acres than needed because of low prices. We drive \$150,000 tractors across nutrient-starved fields and receive the same price or lower than our grandfathers did half a century ago. Meanwhile, Wall Street brokers play the long and short commodity markets, suppressing our markets season after season.

The majority of farmers are burned out, worn out and will do just about anything to make the yearly grind of farming a bit easier. GMO crops have made farming easier. But in our purchase of convenience, we've sold our ability to nourish. We've also sold

our instinct to determine right from wrong.

Daily, I search for answers. Often, I tire of looking. It appears not enough of us in America care enough about the quality of our food or our own health. Perhaps we are just too busy or distracted or tired to care; at least our government and these billion-dollar corporations seem to think so.

Where exactly are we headed with this cluster-freak of a food and fiber system? More lawsuits? More unaccountability? More disease? More cancer? More birth defects? More skeletons in the closet? More transfer of wealth and power to chemical companies? That is exactly what I see happening with the dominance of GMOs and 2,4-D crops on the horizon.

There are other farmers who still care, and many of us fight this battle every day we walk outside. But apparently we have become such a small fraction of the minority, we are being squeezed out. This is why I have written this column. We need your help. We need more people to care, because the few of us left cannot fight this alone.

Eric Herm is a fourth-generation farmer and author of *Son of a Farmer, Child of the Earth* and *Surviving Ourselves*. Visit his website [sonofa-farmer.com](http://sonofa-farmer.com) for more information.