Mint Industry Research Council

SPRING 2022

Insight

IN THIS ISSUE

Members Express Interest in Mother Bed Lines

MIRC board members have expressed interest in learning more about the oil properties of experimental and public varieties archived in the MIRC Mother Bed Lines. It is an interest that could lead to additional research, and an interest that shows the breadth of focus of the MIRC, according to Steve Salisbury, research and regulatory coordinator for the organization.

"I think this shows that the MIRC is not only about pursuing advancements in sustainable production of peppermint and spearmint, but also in niche oils," Salisbury said.

The interest in oil components of the MIRC's Mother Bed Lines came to the forefront at a recent Scientific Affairs Committee (SAC) meeting. In follow-up phone interviews, board members Steve Pringle of Takasago and Richard Carlson of Young Living Essential Oils both expressed their interest in the lines.

"We are interested in learning more about what is available, as far as the production of oil, and what is going to work for the growers," Carlson said.

"We would very much like to understand what is in the oil, what capabilities or properties they have in the Mother Bed," Pringle said.

Both also said they are open to discussing using MIRC funds to further study the oil properties.

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"There already has been some basic analysis," Pringle said, "and from that basic analysis, if we find something that is interesting, I think it could be worth it to grow it out, take a deeper dive into the oil and go from there."

Carlson, an analytic chemist, added that further data could help establish standard reference material for an essential oil, something that currently does not exist.

"You can buy standard reference materials for various chemical compounds and so forth, but there is no place that you can get a standard reference material for an essential oil," Carlson said.

"This gives us that opportunity to create standard reference material for peppermint and spearmint," he said.

The MIRC backed several years of research analyzing the oil properties of the Mother Bed Lines between 1989 and 2001, according to Salisbury, who recently compiled the data for presentation to the Scientific Affairs Committee.

"We have data on ten peppermint lines and about ten spearmints and we have another six that we have archived but don't have data on," Salisbury said.

A dozen of the 26 lines are experimental lines, he said.

Housed in the unincorporated community of Norris, Montana, the MIRC Mother Bed lines are kept in potted plants in secure greenhouses, with duplicates of each line grown invitro.

"Everything is disease-free," Salisbury said. "We test them every year and every year the Mother Bed gets turned over, so there is a whole new set of invitro roots. And we keep the invitro roots in triplicate."

Located about 45 minutes west of Bozeman, the repository, which is managed by Jolene Brush, has excellent isolation, Salisbury added.

Salisbury included high, low and the average percentages of the different oil components of the repository lines in compiling summary data that he presented to the MIRC SAC.

"I did that so the reader could see the range, and if they really wanted to zero down on it, I could send them the research report and they could see, for example, that in a certain region the percentage of a line's menthofuran, for example, was always low, but across the board the variety averages such and such a percentage in North America," Salisbury said.

The summary data on peppermint includes percentage ranges of menthofuran, menthone, total menthol and pulegone. The spearmint data includes percentage ranges of B-pinenen, L-limonene, 3-octanol, dihydrocarvone, L-Carvone and 1,8-Cineole.

The data was compiled on several widely grown commercial varieties archived in the Mother Bed, including peppermint varieties like Black Mitcham and Redefined Mitcham and spearmint varieties like Native and Scotch.

Further research will be required to generate data on additional components, such as organoleptic data in peppermint, Salisbury said.

"Mint is a complex substance," Pringle said, "And we at Takasago are always looking to see if we can push the boundaries, push the edges and create something that is a little different and has a higher level of certain components that will drive consumer preference.

"And yes, the Mother Bed is definitely something we are interested in," he said.

In Memory of Sean Li

Sean Li, age 47, of Lisle Illinois, passed away after a courageous battle with cancer, surrounded by his loving family on Monday, April 25, 2022.

Sean served as the Mars Wrigley representative on the MIRC Board of Directors and was an active supporter of the grower oriented AdvanceMint sustainable grant program.

Sean will be greatly missed by family, friends and the North American mint industry.

Research Finding No Advantage to Extra Water, Nitrogen in Spearmint

A research project in Eastern Washington has found no benefits to increasing water application rates or nitrogen rates above recommended levels in spearmint.

The results so far into the four-year project, which has one year remaining, show it may actually benefit growers to cut back on irrigation late in the season when plants are fully developed, said Washington State University Extension Irrigation Specialist Troy Peters, who is leading the research.

"What we've shown is that especially with spearmint, you can back off a little on the water," Peters said. "Watering it so that plants get going and fill out, that is important. But once it is going, you can kind of back off a little bit, especially before harvest."

Plants undergoing deficit irrigation had less hay than plants receiving the recommended rate in the research, but the same amount of oil, he said.

"So, you can back off, which makes the soil a little firmer, and it doesn't really hurt the oil yields. In fact, because you can get the same amount of oil and less hay, you have fewer truckloads of mint that you are putting through the still, and so, less steam and less energy, but you are still getting the same amount of oil.

"So, there is a profit potential there in kind of backing off a little bit," Peters said.

In the research, Peters looked at three rates of irrigation; one in excess of recommended rates, one right at recommended rates and one below recommended rates. And the researchers looked at three different nitrogen rates. Peters said the goal of the research is to answer a question that growers brought to him: whether it would pay to increase irrigation and/or nitrogen rates.

"Some growers felt that adding a little extra nitrogen was worth the money and some felt that adding a little extra water was worth the money," Peters said.

"The results we've got so far is 'no' on both of those questions," he said. "So, basically, it pays to get those numbers right."

The researchers used standard nitrogen rates based on recommended practices for spearmint and used soil moisture sensors and evapotranspiration data to dial in the irrigation rates.

Peters added that he has seen other experiments that show deficit irrigation doesn't hurt oil yields in spearmint. "We have seen many other times that mild deficits in spearmint, not in peppermint, do not reduce oil yields. It definitely reduces hay yields, but it does not reduce oil yield.

Troy Peters

"But extreme water stress, which is where you are losing plants and plants never reach full cover, that definitely hurts oil yields," Peters said.

He added that deficit irrigation in peppermint hurts oil yields and isn't recommended.

Peters said he didn't find the irrigation findings surprising, but was mildly surprised that adding additional nitrogen over recommended rates had no effect.

"Not being a fertilizer person, I thought we would see a response to adding a little additional fertilizer, but we just didn't," he said.

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WSU Research Technician Ray Baker runs a mini harvester as part of a project analyzing if there are benefits to increasing water and nitrogen application rates above recommended levels in spearmint

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The research, which was funded by the MIRC and Washington Mint Commission, included urea and ammonium-sulfate based nitrogen.

To date, the trial includes an establishment year and two years of data. Researchers plan to collect data again this summer and write up a report by the end of the year.

As a sidebar to the research, the researchers are looking to see if they can gauge water stress through drone-based imagery.

"We thought, hey, we have this field and we have this other thing we can do with it, so we are using it for those studies, as well," Peters said.

The drone study, which is USDA funded, is trying to answer whether drone-based imagery can be used for quantifying evapotranspiration or consumptive use in plants in a spatial context, he said.

Currently, drone-based imagery is used to quantify spatial differences of plant health in a field so growers can find problem areas. "But this will expand the usefulness of drone-based imagery to water stress," Peters said. "We will hopefully be able to tell which plants are stressed with this method."

To date, growers have no reliable way to measure spatial distribution of water stress in a field until it reaches a critical stage, Peters said.

Also, he said, ET (evapotranspiration) models, which use weather data, can help provide feedback on a plant's water consumption. "But what we are doing is actually getting feedback of what is actually happening in a spatial manner, so you can find things like plugged nozzles or problem areas as they are developing."

Researchers plan to develop a report on the drone research for a peer-reviewed publication, Peters said.

WSU Entomologist Doug Walsh bags spearmint as part of a WSU research project. The project showed there were no benefits to increasing water and/or nitrogen application rates above recommended levels.

Ray Baker distilling a mint sample.

New Chair Brings Unique Perspective to Board

As a young accountant working for several agricultural clients in Yakima, Washington, during the first decade of the 2000s, Karla Farina, the new chair of the MIRC Board of Directors, was in her element. With farm roots in northeastern Washington and with an accounting degree from Eastern Washington University, she handled tax and accounting work for big and small agricultural clients.

When Labbeemint offered her a position as Chief Financial Officer, however, she traded that diversity to focus on one company and one agricultural sector, mint. She said the change, which came in 2011, was exciting.

"It was really exciting to me to come on board with Labbeemint and focus on one industry, to get to know the ins and outs of that industry in more detail, rather than being spread across so many industries," Farina said.

"I really enjoy working in the mint industry," she added. "It is so unique. I love working with growers and then getting to know the large, corporate end users and everything in between. There are many diverse interests represented by the Council, which contributes to its success."

Farina takes over for Dana Wendel, who completed a two-year term as Chairman this past January. "We wish to thank Dana for his outstanding service to the organization," said Bryan Ostlund, administrator of the MIRC.

Other Board changes in January included Jeff Johnson of Callisons moving into the Vice Chair position, and A.J. Todd of ADM moving into the Secretary/Treasurer position.

Unlike most past chairs, which came into the position from the science or sales side of the industry, Farina's financial background is unique. Asked how that could influence proceedings, she said, "I hope that I can ask different questions of the researchers, the Board and the Council as a whole.

"The Council has a long history of successful projects. I want to continue that, but ask questions and look at things from a different, maybe more wholistic, long-term-strategy angle to make sure that we are working together to keep the industry moving forward in a positive way," Farina said.

"I'm not afraid to ask questions if I don't understand something," she added. "I know the researchers are very good at what they do, but sometimes it is hard to digest their very detailed reports. I want to try to improve communication of the projects and to help everyone understand what the end goal is and what we are doing to get there."

Farina listed several aspects of the MIRC that she appreciates, including its vertical integration and the way the Council works together for the good of the industry.

"It is a unique industry in that it is relatively small and we are all competitors," she said. "The growers are competitors, the dealers are competitors, we are all competing throughout the year. But I like to think that when we are at those meetings, we are thinking about the industry as a whole rather than what is important to our specific companies.

"We are thinking about the growers first and foremost and how to sustain the industry and keep it going. And I like to think that we leave our differences and our competitiveness aside when we are at these meetings trying to push things forward for the general good of our industry."

Karla Farina, the new chair of the MIRC Board of Directors.

Asked what she views as the biggest issues facing the MIRC in the near future, she said stabilizing and hopefully improving the demand for North American mint oils is perhaps the top issue.

"And we need to continue to work on improvements to our varietals. That is a key focus. And then just to keep on top of the regulatory issues surrounding the chemicals that our farmers are so in need of," she said.

Having only been with the Council for six years, Farina said she is very grateful for the support she has been receiving.

"I feel really thankful for the industry's support," she said. "This is my first time in this role. I know some of the folks that have had this role before me have had long histories with the MIRC. I don't have that, and I appreciate everybody's support."

Four Earn Industry Appreciation Awards

Michigan mint grower Tom Irrer started coming to MIRC meetings in the mid-1980s. He has been coming ever since, serving as state representative or alternate each year since 1985.

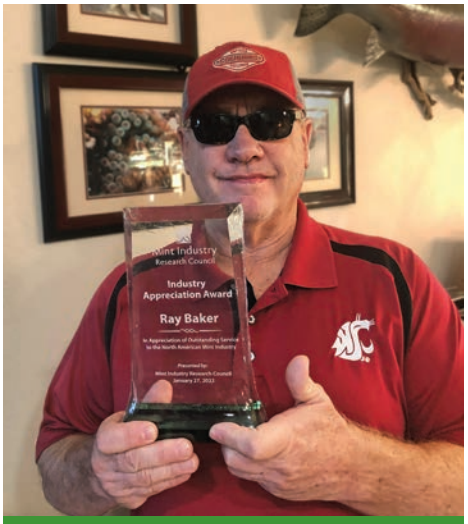
Irrer, along with WSU research technician Ray Baker, Oregon grower John Reerslev and Mark Morlan, CEO and co-founder of Essex Laboratories in Chehalis, Washington, were honored earlier this year with the MIRC's Industry Appreciation Award.

Irrer said he originally traveled to the West Coast to learn about the latest in mint production. Attending MIRC meetings, he said, helped in that regard.

"I wanted to be in the loop," he said. "I like to stay in contact with growers in the Far West to understand technologies that might be brought back here to the Midwest. And I like the opportunity to go out and talk to somebody like (retired USDA ARS weed scientist, now private consultant) Rick Boydston about weed control."

Tom Irrer

John Reerslev



Ray Baker

Mark Morlan

After one trip to the West Coast, Irrer decided to try growing mint on mineral soils, rather than on the muck soils that his family was accustomed to.

"I was one of the first ones in the Midwest to take mint off the muckland and put it on mineral soil," he said. "And we got improved yields, along with good weed control."

Irrer believes the biggest benefit that MIRC brings to the industry is supporting the research necessary to register pesticides.

Like Irrer, Junction City mint producer Reerslev has a long history of serving as state representative or alternate on the MIRC Board. He did so continuously from the 1980s until last year.

"I felt there was a value to be involved and have the different disciplines of the growers, the handlers and the end-users working together," he said.

He added, "I got a lot out of it, and hopefully I gave some back. We, the growers and the end users, have different needs, but we can share our needs at these meetings. And although resources are scarce for research and all, if we pool together, it helps."

Morlan started attending MIRC meetings in the 1970s, back when he was an officer of the Oregon Essential Oil Growers League. He served on the MIRC Board of Directors for four years, beginning in 2018 and ending last January.

With his experience as a mint farmer and flavor-house executive, Morlan brought a unique perspective to the Board. He noted that he first joined the MIRC because of the benefits the organization

provided the industry and a "need and responsibility to pay our fair share."

Baker, who received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Washington Mint Growers Association in December, has worked in weed research in Washington since 1985, first as a research technician for the USDA ARS, then for the last 32 years as a weed science technician for Washington State University.

"These four individuals have made valuable and significant contributions to the MIRC over the years," said Shawn Anderson, administrator of the MIRC. "Each has had a positive impact on the mint industry and we are fortunate to call them friends and partners."

Mars Wrigley Invests in Sustainable Future of Mint

Mars Wrigley is awarding grants to fund four projects as part of their AdvanceMint program. The program encourages sustainable farming and has awarded more than thirty-seven projects over the past five years. This year, three of the four projects focus on irrigation.

The 2022 awardees are Landon Lommers of MLL Farms, Inc., in Wapato, Washington; Todd Wheeler, Sunnyside, Washington; Kent Bowers of Bowers Distillery, Inc., in Harrold, South Dakota; and Daniel Keudell of Keudell Farms, Inc., in Aumsville, Oregon.

- **Landon Lommers awarded $25K:** To help pay for changing its irrigation wheel line power source from gas to solar power electric, which will be operated through use of remote units.
- **Bowers Distillery awarded $6K:** To improve irrigation efficiency with camera technology upgrades to its existing system.
- **Keudell Farms, Inc awarded $15K and $25K:** The farm was awarded two separate grants to upgrade the efficiency of a ten-acre drip irrigation system and for converting to a high-efficiency distillery condenser, respectively.
- **Todd Wheeler/WSU awarded $16,100:** To complete a study on the interaction of nitrogen fertility and irrigation quantity.

"These are well deserved award winners," said Steve Salisbury, research and regulatory coordinator for the Mint Industry Research Council (MIRC), "and great examples of grower creativity and commitment to implement these ideas to improve their farms."

The Mars Wrigley AdvanceMint program will accept applications for the next round of awards from September 1 through December 15 of this year.

According to Mars Wrigley, qualifying practices include distillation efficiency improvements, general water-use reduction, irrigation-efficiency improvements, cover crop - no-till vs. till, water-conservation plans, natural gas-line installation, liquid propane vs. diesel fuel, improved soil testing, and pesticide- and fertilizer-management plans.

ADVANCEMINT
SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AWARDS

As part of the eligibility requirements, award recipients agree to report on the impacts of farming practices within one year after the practice has been implemented.

Among other criteria, a team of judges will evaluate applications based on the proposed project's environmental, social or economic impact, ability of the practice to be adopted and whether the entry provides sound methods for achieving tangible results.

Only farms located in the U.S. and Canada are eligible for the awards.

For more information, contact the MIRC.

Nobody More Dedicated to Mint than Former Purdue Pathologist

Purdue University researcher Ralph Green, who died March 24 at the age of 98, and worked on mint research from the time he was a graduate student in the 1940s into the 2000s, was hands down, the most influential researcher to ever work with mint, according to Midwest mint growers.

"We have a lot of good researchers currently and have had a lot of good ones through the years," said Indiana mint grower Randy Matthys. "But there has been nobody more dedicated to the mint industry than Dr. Ralph Green.

"Nobody compares to what Ralph Green did for the industry," Matthys said.

Green worked with the Midwest mint industry for 33 years as a professor of plant pathology with Purdue University. And, as an emeritus professor, he continued helping solve production issues for many years after his retirement.

"He was as much dedicated to mint growers after his retirement as he was prior to it," Matthys said. "That was his life, the mint industry and trying to help growers in Indiana and the Midwest.

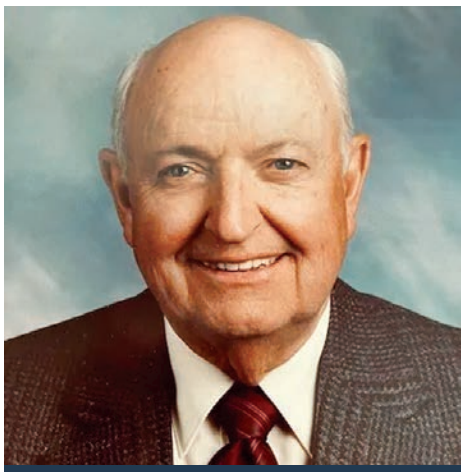
"If growers had questions, they were always welcomed to call Dr. Green. And, if he didn't have answers, he would do a little research and come up with the answers," Matthys said.

"He was a regular speaker at our state meetings," said Indiana mint grower Dan Gumz. "And he was instrumental in putting together information and doing reports on research being done in mint.

"The mint industry was fortunate to have a person like that who stuck with the industry for that long and was really passionate about helping the growers and the industry," Gumz said.

Green's research was widely recognized for work on the pathology of the *Mentha* species, according to an obituary on Green. He and his students showed that the imposed dormancy of the microsclerotia of *V. dahliae* in soil by fungistasis was the primary mechanism of its survival and was reversible by suitable carbon sources, including root exudates.

His research also demonstrated that host specificity in *V. dahliae* was an adaptive process that could be altered.



Ralph Green

Before cultivars of peppermint were developed with some level of genetic resistance to *Verticillium* wilt disease, Dr. Green developed integrated programs to reduce losses from the disease.

"This was truly integrated pest management long before the term was coined," the obituary stated.

Green was also involved in the release of two cultivars with genetic resistance to *Verticillium* wilt, which would be used in rotation programs.

Green served as secretary of the American Phytopathological Society, as well as vice president and president. Green was also an outstanding teacher, graduate advisor and counselor.

"There was nobody more dedicated to the Indiana mint growers or the Midwest mint growers or the U.S. mint industry than Dr. Ralph Green. Hands down."

Randy Matthys,
Indiana mint grower

In 2005, Green was recognized for 50 years of service to the MIRC.

Gumz noted that Green provided him support and encouragement when he started working with the Midwest grower association.

"He was a good mentor for me when I was getting started with the grower association and the board in the late 1990s," Gumz said. "And he was a good friend."

"Nobody compares to what Ralph Green did for the industry," Matthys said. "He was devoted to the industry. And he was a good friend. If he was in the area, working on plots or just in the area, he would always stop in.

"I remember sitting out on the swing, visiting with him. All the growers knew him and he knew all the growers in the area," Matthys said.

"There was nobody more dedicated to the Indiana mint growers or the Midwest mint growers or the U.S. mint industry than Dr. Ralph Green. Hands down." Matthys said.

Chair's Report

Karla Farina, Chair of the Board

I'd like to start my first column as Chair of the MIRC Board of Directors with a thank you for the support I've received within the organization in entrusting me with the responsibilities of this position.

I am humbled and proud to be serving in this capacity.

Within this biannual Chair's Report, I hope to communicate important details in a helpful manner to our membership.

First off, I'd like to take a quick look back and explain the inner workings of what seemed like an eleventh-hour decision to take the 2022 annual meeting from in-person to virtual. I know for many of you, it was inconvenient to have to cancel travel plans at the last minute, but it was a decision the Executive Committee felt was necessary.

At issue was the fact that COVID-19 cases in San Diego, the site of the meeting, were spiking last January. We were concerned not only for the safety of meeting participants but for the possibility of disruptions that we could encounter both in our travels to the meeting and during the meeting.

Adding to the difficulties in making the decision was the work that our administrative staff, particularly Bryan Ostlund and Shawn Anderson, had gone through to get everything prepared, only to have all their work go for naught.

Still, it was a decision the Executive Committee felt was necessary. We understand there was disappointment, and we apologize for the inconveniences experienced by our members.

On the plus side, using the virtual format, we were able to accomplish what we needed to accomplish. The biggest change made during the meeting was to transfer our support of genetics research from Oregon State University and Washington State University to University of California, Davis researchers.

It was a tough decision: We had worked with the Northwest scientists for many years and greatly appreciate what they have contributed to our industry, but it was a decision we felt was in our best interest. I commend the Scientific Affairs Committee on their thoughtfulness and care in putting forth this recommendation.

The UC Davis lab presented a great proposal and is already working on the objectives we are trying to accomplish. It seems like a really good fit for our industry's needs.

We wish the best for our friends at OSU and WSU and hope they stay in touch, but we are also very excited about our new relationship with the UC Davis researchers.

Next, I would like to thank our immediate past Chair Dana Wendel for his two years serving as chair of the Executive Committee and for his many years of contributions to the MIRC Board of Directors. Thank you, Dana, for your hard work in support of our industry and for serving during a difficult time.

Karla Farina

In addition to COVID limiting our ability to meet in person over the past two years, now is a difficult time for our industry. Demand for U.S. mint has decreased, and it has been a challenge to stay in the black while keeping our growers and our other partners happy.

Knowing the character of our industry, however, I am confident we will be able to survive this latest challenge. We have been through tough times before and have always landed on our feet and I am confident we will do so again.

Finally, I want to say that I am looking forward to working with the other two members of our Executive Committee, Jeff Johnson and AJ Todd, over the next two years. Our Fall Scientific Affairs Committee meeting will be virtual once again this fall. Again, this was not a decision we wanted to make, but after so many instances of arranging and then cancelling plans over the past two years, we feel this is the best decision at this time. But I am happy to say that the MIRC's annual meeting next January will be in person in beautiful Charleston, South Carolina, January 25 and 26, 2023.

I can't wait to see everyone together once again!

Research & Regulatory Update

Steve Salisbury

At the risk of losing you within the first sentence of this update, there are some crop protection regulatory items worth bringing up here. Yes, it's not necessarily the most favorable topic and often times is bad news for ag producers. But nonetheless it is important that we are aware of what's going on and how certain actions or directions may impact crop production.

To begin, it goes without saying that the loss of chlorpyrifos has officially taken its place in crop protection history. We have fully discussed this action in past newsletter articles and MIRC presentations in state and regional industry meetings. In my recent presentations, I shared a chart showing the labeled insecticide options that we have available. That chart shows that we have several options for some insect pests and few for some others; garden symphylan being one of concern without much for options.

As for garden symphylan, mint growers still have Mocap (ethoprop) labeled for use, but it is limited to a fall post-harvest application due to the lengthy pre-harvest interval. So, what about late fall or spring applications where Mocap cannot be used? Are there other actives we have labeled on mint whose label could be expanded? Perhaps.

Looking at our existing labels and registrations is a convenient way to search for new options and answers to losing a tool like chlorpyrifos. Mint is fortunate to have a pretty good array of modes of action and pest spectrums to take a look at. And, many of the actives labeled for use on mint are pretty effective compounds.

One option that has been discussed was thiamethoxam (Actara). This insecticide is labeled on mint for control of aphid, flea beetle, fleahopper, grasshopper and leafhopper. This label use is a foliar application to mint. However, we also know that thiamethoxam is labeled under a different trade name and on a different crop for control of garden symphylan. Our intuition would certainly lead us to ask the question, Can we add garden symphylan to the Actara mint label, or mint to the other thiamethoxam label?

These questions were indeed asked to the registrant with hopes of a favorable response. Well, bad news, it's not that straightforward. The other product is registered for a specific use pattern different than our current labeled mint use. Therefore, if we want to add a soil application use pattern, we would need to pursue additional regulatory approval. Further, the extra bad news on this thought is that thiamethoxam is a neonicotinoid. A significant roadblock.

This begs the question, what is the current status of neonics? Currently, the EPA is not accepting any neonics for consideration for new registrations and/or labeled uses. This is because the agency is still reviewing the current registrations of all neonics and their potential impacts, specifically on pollinators. The entire class of chemistry is being reviewed so that the EPA will be consistent throughout the class. Once the assessment is completed, then the agency will pursue risk mitigation. The review of thiamethoxam is scheduled to be complete later in 2022. What that means is that if we want to pursue expanding the thiamethoxam label to include symphylan, then we have to wait until that review is complete and that the risk mitigations implemented by the EPA will allow for our requested use.

Steve Salisbury

While we are discussing the EPA and their review of pesticide registrations, it is worth mentioning another new development. It is no surprise that the agency is continually being sued over several pesticides that they have registered for use on US crops. However, the latest development revolved around the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Interest groups that have filed lawsuits against the EPA claim the agency did not complete the required ESA assessment of active ingredients used for pest control.

What does this mean for pesticide registrations? Going forward, all new active ingredients will go through a complete evaluation of impact on endangered species. The EPA will consult with the US Fish and Wildlife on this evaluation. Furthermore, every active ingredient that the EPA is currently being sued on will go through an ESA evaluation. It should be no surprise that most of the actives being used in US agriculture production seem to be on this "ESA Litigation" list. Currently, the agency is booked out through 2027 to complete these reviews.

How does this ESA litigation affect potential new uses of registered actives? We are not sure exactly at this point. The EPA is developing a strategy to address the issue and will prioritize ESA evaluation in 2022. However, from what we hear in the previous comment above, I'm left to believe that this will have a substantial impact on obtaining new

uses of existing materials. I guess time will tell.

I do want to leave you on a positive note regarding the battles on the pesticide front. I'm pleased to report that the IR-4 project is slated to get its first budget increase from Congress in over a decade. Congressional leaders reached an agreement on a spending bill which includes additional funding for IR-4. Of course, they still need to officially vote and approve the bill, but indications are the vote will pass.

The IR-4 project is a federally funded program responsible for developing the data and information needed to support specialty crop industries in obtaining pesticide registrations, labels and tolerances (MRLs). This program is critical to the mint industry and the MIRC certainly remains engaged in the Commodity Liaison Committee which assists IR-4 in obtaining federal funding. This increase in IR-4's budget helps shore up the program that was facing substantial reductions which would directly impact US minor crops including mint. Regardless of individual political views on the spending bill, this budget increase is a welcomed improvement to IR-4, mint and all US minor crops.

As always, please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or want to discuss any of these issues or other mint topics. Have a great spring!

Annual Meeting All Set for Charleston

The MIRC Administrative Office is happy to announce that it is all systems go for the MIRC's 2023 Annual Meeting. The meeting will be held in Charleston, South Carolina on January 25 and 26.

"We look forward to being in South Carolina and getting everybody back together again," said Bryan Ostlund, administrator of the MIRC. "We have genuinely missed getting together, both on a professional level and on a personal level."

This will be the first time MIRC members get together in person since the 2020 meeting in Scottsdale, Arizona, after health concerns over COVID-19 forced the MIRC Administrative Office to cancel the last two annual meetings.

"We were certainly sorry to have to cancel the meetings, especially the 2022 meeting," Ostlund said. "We were really looking forward to getting together, but issues surrounding COVID were changing so rapidly, and especially in San Diego County, that at some point it just became obvious that the meeting wasn't going to take place.

"Hopefully issues surrounding coronavirus will continue to fade away in the rearview mirror," Ostlund added. "It is just so important for the MIRC to have an opportunity to stay in contact with one another. Yes, we will have a virtual Scientific Affairs Committee meeting in September, but we have both the 2023 and 2024 annual meetings planned at convention facilities and we look forward to seeing everyone".

The 2023 meeting is scheduled at the Charleston Marriott. The hotel offers easy access to historic downtown Charleston, the old city market, local area beaches, The Citadel and great dining and entertainment.

The 2024 meeting is scheduled for the Kona Kai Resort and Spa in San Diego.

Shawn Anderson, administrator of the MIRC, said the organization decided to hold the September SAC meeting virtually to help avoid further cancellation penalties with hotels due to continued uncertainty surrounding COVID-19. It will take place over two days on September 20 and 21.

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