**Farmers get ready for new pesticide rules**

MICHELLE BRUNETTI POST | Posted: Wednesday, July 27, 2016 6:06 pm

HAMILTON TOWNSHIP — New federal standards for protecting agricultural workers and their families from pesticide exposure will come into effect in January, and officials were at a farm here Wednesday to talk about the changes.

The Environmental Protection Agency’s Worker Protection Standard, updated for the first time in 24 years, will protect the estimated 13,000 people who work New Jersey’s agricultural land each year, said EPA Regional Administrator Judith A. Enck in a presentation at Atlantic Blueberry Company.

Nationwide about two million people work in forests and on farms, nurseries and greenhouses, according to the EPA.

Enck said farmworkers provide an essential service, and deserve to have their health protected.

“Being out here in the heat is hard, back-breaking work,” Enck said. “We want to make sure there is no added burden of exposure to pesticides.”

The event was held under a tent at the edge of Atlantic Blueberry’s fields off Weymouth Road near Hammonton.

“Our industry is ready to work with these agencies on the new regulations,” said Atlantic Blueberry Co. Manager Denny Doyle. “Hopefully it’s a two-way conversation.”

Atlantic Blueberry’s third-generation farmer John Galletta is the food safety coordinator for the company who handles worker safety, and Julie Schneider is its Integrated Pest Management supervisor who helps minimize the use of pesticides, Doyle said.

But he said smaller growers often don’t have the financial resources to meet new regulations, such as a requirement for medical testing of workers who use respirators when applying pesticides.

Doyle also runs his family’s small fourth-generation blueberry farm, he said, and will probably be the last in his family to keep farming because of the regulatory burden.
While New Jersey already had many state rules that were more stringent than the old federal rules, its farmers will have to make some adjustments to meet the new federal standards.

Enck said the federal standards had never before set a minimum age for working with pesticides. Now no one under age 18 will be allowed to handle pesticides, she said.

“New Jersey had 16 as its minimum age, now it will shift to 18,” said Enck.

She said the EPA is working hand-in-hand with the state Department of Environmental Protection, which will enforce the new rules.

Nancy Santiago of Worker Protection Services in the state DEP’s Bureau of Pesticide Compliance, said New Jersey’s rules on record keeping remain stricter than the federal rules, even after the update.

The biggest change for New Jersey farmers will be complying with rules on respirator and fit testing, she said.

Workers using respirators for pesticide application will now have to undergo medical evaluation and other testing and training.

Santiago said about half of the 3,500 pesticides used on farms require respirators in some situations.

She said her office will concentrate on helping farmers understand the new rules from now until the end of the year.

The state has about 9,000 farms, on about 700,000 acres, Enck said.

Rutgers Cooperative Extension’s Atlantic County Agricultural Agent Richard van Vranken said only about 1,500 of those farms are large commercial enterprises.

Extension offices will help get the word out through educational materials and workshops offered to farmers in the off season, said Pat Hastings, Pesticide Safety Education Program Coordinator for New Jersey Cooperative Extension.

“We will work in cooperation with each county, that’s the only way we can reach everyone,” Hastings said.

The New Jersey Farm Bureau and the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Farm Service Agency will also help with education, representatives said.

Immediate family members of farm owners are exempt from the new regulations, according to the EPA.

MORE INFORMATION:

Nancy Santiago, state Department of Environmental Protection Bureau of Pesticide Compliance, 609-984-6568.

Pat Hastings, New Jersey Cooperative Extension Pesticide Safety Education Program, 848-932-0176.

Contact: 609-272-7219

MPost@pressofac.com

Twitter @MichelleBPost