



IR-4 Update: 2025 Food Workshop Updates & Reflections

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Food Program

| Item | 2025 | 2024 | 2023 |
|---|------|---------|----------|
| Food Approvals (tolerances/registrations) | 3/3 | 52/1024 | 211/1613 |

- No chance of coming close to past success during 2025; very few new regulatory approvals for IR-4
- Industry is facing the same challenges
- IR-4 continues to submit about the same number of tolerance petitions

Why so few new tolerances/registrations

- This is not uncommon with a new President—typically a moratorium on new regulations for the first 100 days.
- EPA (Office of Pesticide Programs) lost a significant number of highly experienced employees
 - e.g. Nancy Fitz, Minor Use Team Leader
- For IR-4, pollinator data gaps are the most pressing issue with the EPA we are facing
- Also, there are concerns about taking an ESA-compliant chemical and adding new uses to take it out of compliance.

EPA Stop Light Analysis

Quick Observations

- Lack of Pollinator Data triggered many chemicals to be classified as YELLOW or ORANGE
- Human pathogen disease resistance — RED
- PFAS — RED
- Neonics — No change
- Bifenthrin — Green

New Use of EPA Stop Light Analysis

- EPA feedback traditionally focused its color rating for the chemical/crop combination in residue studies.
 - Required for the IR-4 PRIA waiver
- This has not changed. New this year, IR-4 is highlighting chemicals that only need E/CS data and pesticide is classified as RED.
 - Most of these projects will be paused

Food Priority Setting Workshop

Quick Updates

- New Project Clearance Requests deadline was July 1, 2025, to accommodate companies and EPA timelines
- 35 new residue study priorities for 2026. Cuts to post-workshop Priority Upgrade/Regional Upgrades; the savings are redirected for laboratory analysis.
- Five National and four Regional Integrated Solutions priorities

Food Priority Setting Workshop

- We will assess **248 potential projects** for residue and/or E/CS
 - 91 Herbicides
 - 89 Insecticides
 - 68 Fungicides
- We will assess **86 potential projects** for Integrated Solutions funding
 - 9 Herbicide
 - 34 Insecticide
 - 43 Fungicide

Expect tough decisions

Food Priority Setting Workshop

- First Food Use Workshop: September 28-30, 1981
- Most common venues: St. Louis and Orlando
- Three-day meeting (one day for each discipline). No nominations, everything up for discussion:
 - Each discipline was allocated an equal number of priorities
 - Tropical crops were prioritized outside of workshop
 - Certain crops (hop/mint/cranberry) were given entitlement

Food Priority Setting Workshop

- Revamped process in the early 2000's
 - Established nominations, reduce the number of projects
 - Allocations/entitlement eliminated
 - Workshop shortened
- First round by discipline > downgrade the number of considered projects
- Second round by commodity > get to the allocated number of priorities
- Recently, very few projects are downgraded in the first round

Food Priority Setting Workshop

- Why so few projects are downgraded in the first round?
 - According to RFC, uncertainty about whether a company will support projects. Legitimate comment > changes
 - Opportunity to build support
 - Playing the game
- PLEASE....If a project is not in your top two for a crop during first round, consider downgrading it to a B

IR-4 Laboratory Situation

- Service Standard: Analysis complete and Analytical Summary Report submitted within one year of receipt of the last sample set. **BACKLOG is >12 months.** Over 50% of studies are in BACKLOG.
- Reasons:
 - Laboratory closures/personnel
 - EPA enforcing the need for Guideline Storage Stability
 - IR-4 Culture
- We are engaging the services of Contract Laboratories to help us get out of the hole we are in (EXPENSIVE).
- Working smarter to minimize the impact of Storage Stability

IR-4 Culture

- Proud to say, IR-4 is “**Grower Centric**” — if a grower needs something, we do our best to figure it out. We need to keep this culture while recognizing that resources are not unlimited; proposing additional considerations at future FUWs:
 - The degree of difficulty of analytical analysis
 - The amount of effort associated with a crop
 - e.g. Hemp vs. Lettuce
- Speaking about hemp, we analyze extra fractions that are not regulated by EPA – No longer have the resources to be proactive

Environmental Horticulture Program

- Hired Josh Kindel in June, former VP for Bodine
 - Background in Entomology with experience in Regulatory
 - Also background in Marketing
- Primary task is preparing for the upcoming Ornamental Workshop:
 - October 7-8 in Kansas City, MO
- EXCELLENT response on Grower & Extension Survey; will have a lot to discuss at the Workshop
- The 2026 allocation for research will be the same as 2024

I hope this is wrong....

- ARS does 15-20% of the field/laboratory work for IR-4
- In 2024, the ARS decided to cut funds for QA audits at its sites. Also, eliminated investment in Ornamental research at UMES
- FRD at ARS-Salinas, CA site no longer doing work for IR-4; she is the primary cardholder to pay ARS bills in the Pacific Region
- The ARS Wapato, WA laboratory has not taken any new residue samples since 2023 > catch up on backlog
 - Lead Chemist retiring in December > lab will close
- ARS hiring freeze/IR-4 positions are low priority

USDA-NIFA Funding

Annual Appropriation

- After a **LONG** delay, the 2025 Request for Application for IR-4 funding was released on July 31. The release commonly occurs in Feb/March.
 - Helped by efforts by CLC/Friends of IR-4
- Short response period
 - Normally 45 days — truncated to 14 days — submitted in 7
- Typical processing time by the USDA is 4 months. Funds need to be released by September 30 or they go back to the US Treasury.

NRSP-4/Hatch Funds

- Ag Innovation (SAES) is cutting IR-4 funding approximately \$75,000



Funding Challenges

- Great stakeholder support (Friends of IR-4/CLC), but prospects of more funding via NIFA are weak
- ARS involvement may diminish
- Host institutions are reducing in-kind contributions to IR-4
- Industry cutbacks
- Costs are increasing

Something has to give....but what?

- Fewer residue studies?
- Less product performance projects?
- Reduce Integrated Solutions?

Executive Director Recruitment

- Position finally posted in early summer. Great response: over **30 applications**. Almost all of the candidates qualified for the position.
- The Search and Selection Committee identified **eight candidates** for additional screening (Zoom interviews).
- Anticipate that this will narrow the field down to **2-3 candidates for in-person interviews** at IR-4 Headquarters in October.
- NC State has instituted a hiring and salary capacity policy in anticipation of State/Federal funding challenges > new person will not be able to start until January 2026

Reflections

There is a lot to be proud of

- Thousands of registration successes
- Helping specialty crop farmers solve problems so they can stay in business and contribute to rural economies.
- IR-4 Project activities/efforts contribute \$8.97 billion to the annual gross domestic product.
- Feed the world with reasonably priced fresh and processed fruits and vegetables...the good stuff
- Develop regulatory schemes that service the regulated community (Crop Groups, Zone Maps)
- Export the IR-4 concept to the world (Minor Use Foundation)



Challenges

- Funding, funding, funding (Federal/University/Industry)
- Access to crop protection technology
- Unpredictable approval process by the EPA
- Public pushback against chemical pesticides and new technology
- International regulations limiting domestic use
- Stakeholder support

Our strength is our people

- Fortunate to work with so many hard-working, dedicated people
 - IR-4 co-workers
 - Companies
 - Commodity Groups
 - Government (EPA & USDA)
 - NC State
 - Mentors
- Through their collective efforts, they made my time at IR-4 so fulfilling—truly a dream job!





Thank You!
