

Crop and stock chemical rules in spotlight

The dichotomous regulation of chemicals for animal and crop protection is hindering the agricultural industry and increasing the likelihood of farmers using unregistered products.

Speakers at the Association of Veterinary and Crop Associations of South Africa (AVCASA) made a plea to government to streamline the chemical and medicine registration process and provide better regulation.

Dr Peter Oberem, president of the SA Animal Health Association (SAAHA), said that it was the regulators' job to ensure that products reached the market. "But overlapping administrative issues ensure that a product takes years to reach the market," he said.

Oberem said that since most products in SA were developed and registered elsewhere in the world, it was unnecessary to go through a rigorous process of testing products and checking residues. "Why must we reinvent the wheel? Regulators should focus on the quality of manufacture rather than on retesting products."

Dr Bernhard Johnen, director of international regulatory policy at Crop Life International, added that regulation should be a stimulant and a safeguard for the introduction of crop protection products, not a hindrance.

"Farmers need to protect their crops and ensure a harvest. We need to improve yields and reduce waste, and crop protection is the solution to many problems facing food production and food security," said Johnen.

Speakers at AVCASA noted that a lack of capacity in government departments delayed registration, and led to farmers using unregistered products on their crops.

Kobus Hartman, business development and technical manager at Viking Marketing, gave an example of bud mite on grapes for which there is currently no registered active ingredient. "We are nearing the spraying season and farmers are going to resort to the use of unregistered products or face losing their crop."

He said that public-private partnerships were needed to compensate for the lack of capacity in the regulatory industry.

Hartman said that there were too few laws protecting the environment from harmful chemicals. "This area needs more regulation; there are too many things affecting the environment negatively."

Taking a firm stand with farmers who do not use chemicals as directed, Dr Gerhard Verdoorn, director of the Griffon Poison Information Centre, said that if farmers wanted to have crop protection tools at their disposal, they needed to use them properly. – *Lindi van Rooyen*