

## CHEMICALS

## Farmers lose out as supermarkets compete

Competitive European supermarkets are increasingly using the chemical card. This has negative repercussions for farmers as allowable crop protection chemicals dwindle.

Kobus Hartman, business development and technical manager at Viking Marketing, said that each supermarket had its own list of allowable minimum residue levels (MRLs) for farmers. This was advertised to the consumer in a kind of show-off as to who could provide the safest food.

"In the process, consumer perception is manipulated and the consumer gets the impression that all chemicals used for crop protection should be banned."

Hartman said this posed a threat to food security and affordable farming as the less crop protection a farmer can use, the more difficult it is to provide food.

"New European Union (EU) regulations leave less room for active chemicals and more room for regulation, which puts huge stress on availability and choice of food. Politicians are aided by fanatics and the internet-educated who profess to be scientific experts. This slowly chips away at crop protection methods available to farmers."

Hartman said that EU consumers were becoming more aware of environmental issues. "They have become very water conscious and are starting to insist on certain irrigation practices before they will accept produce. Flood irrigation is frowned upon, but they don't understand that drip irrigation in the Orange River basin won't get you anywhere."

"It is important that South African farmers are involved with regulatory processes in the EU at the point of conception. We need to get our point across so that our production is not negatively affected."

On a positive note, he said that EU supermarkets were moving towards partnerships with farmers. "They want transparency with suppliers and are taking a more pragmatic approach to food production instead of the previous dogmatic attitude that existed." – *Lindi van Rooyen*