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California Organic Growers Gain a \$24 Million Exemption from a Worker Protection Rule

The study, *Why California Organic Growers Want an Exemption from a Farm Worker Protection Rule*, is available at: http://www.croplifefoundation.org/cpri_resbriefs.htm.

On October 8, 2004 the California Occupational Safety and Health Standards Board adopted an emergency regulation banning unnecessary hand weeding of crops by agricultural workers because of the substantial risk of back injury incurred while hand weeding. This emergency regulation is to be followed with a permanent rule. Certified organic growers are exempted from the rule.



Photo: Farm Employers Labor Service

The Crop Protection Research Institute has prepared an analysis of the California hand weeding ban's exemption for organic agriculture which, for the first time, quantifies the amount of hand weeding that organic growers use and the economic benefits that accrue to organic growers as a result of the exemption. The study calculates the economic benefits to organic growers of the hand weeding exemption as \$24 million with the utilization of 775,000 hours of hand weeding exempted from the rulemaking.

The hand weeding ban is the latest action to curb weed control practices that result in substantial risks of back injury from constant and repetitive labor in a stooped position. The current hand weeding ban is designed to close a loop hole in a regulatory action of 1975 which banned weed removal by workers with short handled hoes. The short handled hoe was banned with no exemptions. Because workers bend even farther, hand weeding is more injurious to workers backs than weeding with the short handled hoe.

Organic crop interests sought and were granted an exemption from the ban on hand weeding, claiming that they would incur "tremendous" economic losses if they were required to use laborers with long handled hoes rather than hand weeders. The use of long handled hoes would likely result in losses of valuable organic produce due to crop damage and less precise weed control. Non-organic growers are far less dependent on hand weeding because of their use of chemical herbicides.

The Crop Protection Research Institute is a research unit of the CropLife Foundation. Established in January 2004, the Institute is a non-advocacy research organization focused on economic analysis of agricultural pests, pest management, and pesticide use and regulation in the United States.

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