

Opinion

Is There A Link Between Colony Collapse, MSG?

BY RITA BRHEL
P&D Correspondent

I have this problem with monosodium glutamate, otherwise known as MSG. Maybe you've heard of it — it's in nearly every processed food in American grocery stores and restaurants, and for sensitive individuals, it can be sickening at best, fatal at worst. My reactions trend toward the middle: headache, dizziness, ataxia, disorientation, hives, asthma, gastrointestinal distress, exhaustion. Nothing fun about that.



Rita BRHEL

MSG is processed from something natural, such as corn or wheat, and the end product is used as a flavor enhancer. It tricks the body into liking a food more than it would otherwise. Quite the advantage for food processors; it's a great way for processors to keep the cost of food down and consumers happy. But it can also cause sensitivities in some consumers, so much so that it's not allowed in baby food. I always wonder about ingredients that aren't found in baby food, because how safe can they be?

Well, a few years ago, a new growth enhancer was created called Auxigro, to be sprayed on crops. It was very common on fruits and vegetables, and because it was created from natural ingredients, it was approved for organic growers as well. Auxigro was basically MSG in a bottle. Its main ingredient was food-grade MSG. And it worked very well at boosting growth in our produce, and was very popular among farmers. Not only was this an obviously huge issue for all of us MSG-sensitive folks, but it turns out that it may have been the mystery factor in Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) — when all the honey bee colonies started disappearing and the media was filled with doom-and-gloom predictions of the "end times" via

plants losing their pollinators. Suspiciously, Auxigro use dropped off at the same time that CCD incidences seemed to lessen in intensity. Even more suspiciously, Auxigro's disappearance was very quiet. In fact, apparently the USDA was seemingly unaware of the Auxigro-CCD coincidence, although it could be also that while Auxigro appears to be implicated, the USDA doesn't want to make any rash judgments not based in replicable, peer-reviewed research.

But still...wow, what a coincidence. And here's a possible reason why Auxigro did lead to CCD: At its core, CCD describes a phenomenon when otherwise healthy bees would abandon their hives. There wouldn't be dead bees, just gone bees. This is actually a natural phenomenon, just a disorder when it's at epidemic proportions. The queen bee will naturally release a pheromone that repels her workers in times of extreme threat, so that the workers leave the hive. Auxigro contained hydrolysed casein, which is derived from a protein in dairy, which naturally contains MSG, but when processed, also creates a chemical that mimics the worker-repelling pheromone. The theory is that because Auxigro was applied aerially, and was so popular as to be used on so many crops including those pollinated by honey bees, that the countryside was basically blanketed by the very pheromone that tells bees to abandon their hives.

Sounds a bit like a conspiracy theory, I admit, especially since the CCD investigation is still ongoing and the mass media didn't break out with a report on Auxigro. Yet, there is no denying that Auxigro was once very popular and in widespread use, and now is not. And CCD is not nearly at the peak of alarm that it was a few years ago. Certainly makes a person think.



PHOTO: METRO GRAPHICS

More Winter Wheat?

Will Drought-Stricken Farmers Turn To Winter Wheat As An Alternative?

BY RITA BRHEL
P&D Correspondent

Dryland corn and soybean yields this year are on track to be downright pitiful. Corn producers are reporting 18- to 20-bushel corn, with only six-inch ears and some rows without any ears at all. Even irrigated acres leave room for improvement, as farmers just could not keep the pump going at the speed that this hot, dry summer pulled water out of the crops.

According to the National Agricultural Statistics Service's Crop Progress Report, fall harvest is well ahead of schedule in both South Dakota and Nebraska but quality is far behind the average year. As of Sept. 9, 12 percent of the corn crop in Nebraska had been harvested, compared to 1 percent in an average year. Just 4 percent of Nebraska corn rated excellent in terms of condition in the field, 27 percent as good, 26 percent fair, and 43 percent as poor to very poor. In South Dakota, corn harvest is not normally even started yet, but so far, 7 percent is out, with 2 percent rated as excellent, 19 percent good, 28 percent fair, and 51 percent poor to very poor.

On the soybean side, as of Sept. 9, Nebraska had not begun harvest, which is on par for the average year, but South Dakota, which usually has not begun yet, has harvested 3 percent of its crop. In Nebraska, 1 percent of soybeans are rated as excellent, 17 percent as good, 35 percent as fair, and 47 percent poor to very poor. In South Dakota, 4 percent of soybeans are excellent, 21 percent as good, 30 percent fair, and

45 percent poor to very poor. And now, as fall harvest gets under way and producers are seeing exactly how their crops fared this year, it is time for winter wheat to go in the field. Since at least July, there has been talk about whether winter wheat might be more attractive to producers who are suffering major losses on the soybeans and corn. Earlier this month, the South Dakota Wheat Commission in Pierre was predicting more interest in winter wheat this year.

But the Crop Progress Report isn't reflecting an increase in interest yet. The National Agricultural Statistics Service reports that, as of Sept. 9, winter wheat planting is 8 percent done in Nebraska where 16 percent is typical for this date and 19 percent was done last year. In South Dakota, 14 percent is planted by this time in the average year, as it was at this time in 2011, but only 8 percent so far this year. It could be that producers are holding off on planting in hopes of rain, or it could be that they fear taking the risk of another drought-stricken crop.

In fact, the U.S. Department of Agriculture — as of Sept. 12 — lowered its 2012-13 winter wheat production forecast by 5.2 percent. Some producers, even those who usually grow winter wheat and are planning their typical acres for this upcoming season, say that the soil is just too dry. Winter wheat is known for

being able to withstand drier conditions than many crops, but it still needs moisture and, right now, there is not enough in the dirt for emergence. Without growth before the weather forces plants to enter dormancy, there will be reduced yields at best.

"Winter wheat producers have been faced with planting into dry soil before, although this may be one of the most widespread occurrences in recent history," said Bob Fanning, plant pathology field specialist with the South Dakota State University Extension in Winner. "One of the worst results of planting into dry soil is if the seed gets just enough moisture to germinate but not enough for the seedlings to survive if dry conditions return."

There is also increasing concern of another global wheat shortage, last seen in 2008, which would result in higher market prices for wheat growers but would also send food prices skyrocketing. Russia and Australia are also seeing devastating droughts. The Food Institute, a trade association based in Saddle River, N.J., predicts a family of four to spend \$351.12 more on food for the year in 2013 than 2012. Most of the increase will be at the meat counter, particularly beef, as well as fresh produce.

The Food Institute recommends that producers opt for canned and frozen products, which is expected to increase in price as

well but not at the rate of fresh foods, and to consider poultry as their protein source. A wheat shortage would certainly send processed grain products up in price to add to the pain at the grocery register.

What to do? Fanning offered three strategies for planting winter wheat into dry soil:

1. Plant at the normal seeding depth of 1.5 to 2 inches at the normal time, from now through Oct. 20, and hope for rain — If the dry weather persists through Oct. 20, producers should then treat the field as if they had planted late. Late-planted wheat is seeded at a higher rate with a fungicide seed treatment and a starter fertilizer. The risk is, if there is no rain, the wheat will not germinate until spring and yields will be significantly reduced.

2. Use a hoe drill to plant into moisture at the normal planting time — This will only work if there is good soil moisture within reach of the drill. Some wheat varieties work better than others for drilling, and seeding rates should be increased since deep planting is associated with below normal emergence or delayed emergence, the latter of which is often linked to more disease and pest problems.

3. Wait for rain and then plant — If the weather remains dry, the best option may be to forgo a winter crop this year.

Hay To Be Removed From State Highway Right Of Way

PIERRE — The South Dakota Department of Transportation requests the cooperation of all farmers and ranchers in removing processed hay from the highway right of way.

State regulations require that hay be removed from the right of way within 30 days of being processed, but no later than Oct. 1.

Removing hay bales from the highway right of way is an

important safety consideration for motorists. The bales or stacks can be a safety hazard for vehicles forced to leave the road and, in some cases, can restrict a driver's sight distance. Hay left in the road ditches late in the year can also cause snowdrifts across the highway.

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