



LSP Myth Buster #8

An ongoing Land Stewardship Project series on ag myths & ways of deflating them.

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Myth: *Insecticide sprays eliminate pest problems in farm fields.*

Fact:

In some cases, insecticides can actually make the problem worse. These chemicals can do this by either creating resistant superbugs, or by wiping out competitors.

For example, during the 1980s, farmers raising high-yielding rice in Asia found that populations of the brown plant hopper pest actually ballooned after spraying. It turned out the insecticides were more efficient at killing the hopper's natural predators than the pest itself. Indonesian rice farmers tried waiting to spray until the hopper's densities rose above a critical threshold. Below that threshold, the hopper's predators—which were now thriving in an insecticide-free environment—pulled pest control duty. During the past dozen years, insecticide use in Indonesia has fallen 80 percent and rice yields have risen 25 percent, according to the *New Scientist* magazine.

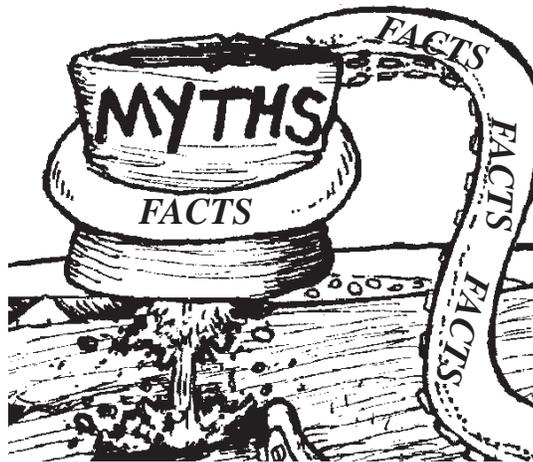
This is just one example of farmers using a technique called integrated pest management (IPM). IPM is gaining popularity with farmers who

are trying to cut back on chemical use while maintaining a sustainable system of pest control. The first lesson of successfully implementing IPM is close monitoring of farm fields, pests and beneficial predators.

More Information

◆ To download a pdf version of the paper "Promoting Sustainable Insect Management Strategies: Learning From Organic Farmers," log onto http://agecon.lib.umn.edu/cgi-bin/pdf_view.pl?paperid=4768&ftype=.pdf.

◆ The May 18, 2002, issue of the *New Scientist* (www.newscientist.com) carries an article about the use of insecticides in Indonesia.



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This Myth Buster is brought to you by the members and staff of the Land Stewardship Project, a private, nonprofit organization devoted to fostering an ethic of stewardship for farmland and to seeing more successful farmers on the land raising crops and livestock. For more information, call 651-653-0618 or visit www.landstewardshipproject.org.