



## Pesticides threaten health

The one line that jumped off the page in Duncan W. Alderson's letter, May 30, on pesticide use, was the remark attributed to the farmer who said, "Roundup is OK -- you can drink it." Make no mistake about it; Roundup is hazardous to your health and to the environment.

Glyphosate (Roundup) is a highly toxic herbicide that is the third most commonly reported cause of pesticide-related illness among agricultural workers.

A study by oncologists Dr. Leonard Hardell and Dr. Mikael Eriksson, of Sweden, revealed clear links between glyphosate (Roundup) to non-Hodgkins lymphoma.

Other studies suggest that even at low levels that are currently legal for our food, Roundup may cause DNA damage, endocrine disruption, infertility, low sperm count and cancer, as well as kidney, liver, cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, nerve and respiratory disorders.

Independent studies suggest that Roundup is toxic to beneficial soil-dwelling fungi, earthworms, insects, birds, bees, butterflies and mammals, and that genetically modified plants that are immune to Roundup are more susceptible to disease.

Research done at the University of Pittsburgh has lead to the conclusion that Roundup is "extremely lethal" to amphibians. Their studies were replicated and the conclusion was confirmed.

In the end, Roundup defeats its purpose, seeing that repeated exposure to Roundup has developed Frankenstein superweeds in several weed species that have become resistant to herbicides.

**Russell Stepanchak**, Columbia

## School districts reeling from mandates

The Intell and the New Era continue to run editorials challenging school districts on recent decisions to eliminate and reduce programs and to charge activity fees.

School districts throughout Pennsylvania have been grappling with budgets where expenses continue to exceed revenue. The state has done a great job limiting revenue growth -- what districts need help with is mandate elimination.

The reality is that school district budgets have very little discretionary spending -- most is required by federal or state law.

My school district has five schools, yet we are required to bus to 54 -- yes, 54 -- schools every day. State law mandates that, if we bus to our schools, we are required to bus to all schools students who live in our district attend.

If we eliminated all transportation, we would reduce our expenses by \$1 million.

State law mandates that we pay the full cost of students attending cyber school.

These students receive free Internet access, a free computer and a free printer -- courtesy of taxpayers. This expense now costs my district over \$600,000

per year. The state used to pay for 50 percent of this expense until last year.

The state teacher pension contribution amount is determined by the state.

This year, we will see an increased expense of almost \$400,000. Larger increases loom over the next several years to fund a pension program which offers ridiculous benefits which are not available in the private sector.

The last few years has been a good time for reflection by local school boards as we examine what is really necessary to provide a quality education for our young people.

Most districts have eliminated programs and positions, increased class size, have negotiated for wage freezes and/or increases much lower than in the past, and have increased employee contributions for health care.

Many have started to sell advertising space and are now charging activity fees for participation in extra-curricular activities. The fees being charged do not come close to covering the costs of the various activities.

In my district, we spend \$750,000 for sports and other extracurriculars and the activity fee increased revenue by less than \$50,000.

Sports and extracurriculars are part of the education process. The question regarding activity fees boils down to should property owners pay for the cost of the football team or should that cost be borne by the students who participate and the spectators who attend the games?

The larger question is this: When will the commonwealth provide real mandate relief to allow school boards to really reduce spending and property taxes?

**Scott Riekers**, Treasurer, Lampeter-Strasburg School District

(Editors' note: The writer stresses that his comments are his personal views and not necessarily those of the L-S School District or school directors.)