
———— POSITION PAPER ————

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

CAPCA recognizes that the potential for a conflict of interest exists whenever a Pest Control Adviser (PCA) writes a recommendation that can be influenced by direct or indirect financial gain. A conflict of interest may exist for any PCA, regardless of their type of employer. Sources of conflict can arise from:

- a financial connection between the PCA and the pest management product or method recommended,
- trying to insure lack of pest damage via unnecessary or overly cautious controls,
- by expanding business beyond that which the PCA can responsibly service.

Good pest management advice is critical to the economic and environmental well-being of the agricultural and horticultural industries, and to the stewardship of public lands throughout California. Pest management is highly technical and its most critical aspect, the recommendation, is by law the responsibility of state licensed PCAs. All PCAs have a duty to their clients and to the public to recommend pest management products and methods based solely on the best available biological, economic, and environmental information relevant to the situation.

A free market economy and a highly competitive business environment provide powerful checks and balances to PCA professionalism. Clients choose from a variety of PCAs, and if unsatisfied with the advice they have paid for, will select another PCA. Any PCA who allows consideration of personal financial gain to adversely affect the quality of their recommendations will suffer business consequences. CAPCA's reputation and livelihood are at stake every time a recommendation is made. PCAs cannot afford to sacrifice their reputation, employment and career for the sake of short-term gains.

In addition to a competitive marketplace, PCAs work in a highly regulated industry. Individuals must meet strict educational and testing requirements to become PCAs. State approved continuing education is required to maintain their license. All recommendations are required by law to be in writing, and are a matter of public record. These recommendations are subject to scrutiny by regulatory authorities. Violations of state laws or regulations are cause for suspension or loss of the PCA license. Errors in recommendations can result in civil or criminal fines and/or civil lawsuits.

CAPCA expects all member PCAs to uphold their duty to their clients and to the public, as well as their ethical obligation to their profession, by making all recommendations according to the highest standards of conduct.

Competition

Pest control advising is an extremely competitive profession that has formal and informal checks and balances for any person who is operating in an unethical manner. PCAs have expended many years to obtain their licenses, training and knowledge of crop systems. They have built reputations as experts and specialists. PCAs cannot afford to conduct themselves in a manner that would jeopardize their standing in the community or in their client's eyes. The PCA's reputation and relationships are an important component of the professional advice that they market to customers. That business is too important to allow a perception of a conflict because clients would not stand for such treatment. The farmers, businesses and other producers in this state are far more sophisticated than the conflict of interest proponents claim.

Summary

As an organization, The California Agricultural Production Consultants Association (CAPCA) represents over 3,600 licensed pest control advisers (PCAs). The CAPCA organization passed a resolution on conflict of interest in 1980 and reaffirmed the position in 1991. The Research and IPM Committee spent considerable time to develop a formal position paper for the members.