

I-TEAM: WEED KILLER COULD BE LURKING IN SOME CALIFORNIA WINES

A lab test of 10 California wines concluded they all contain the active ingredient from weed-killer, glyphosate, a chemical classified a "probable carcinogen" by the World Health Organization. This I-Team investigation is sending shock waves through wine country. (KGO-TV)

By Dan Noyes
Friday, April 29, 2016 01:02AM
ST. LOUIS (KGO) --

A lab test of 10 California wines concluded they all contain the active ingredient from weed-killer, glyphosate, a chemical classified a "probable carcinogen" by the World Health Organization. This I-Team investigation is sending shock waves through wine country.

We know how important this issue is to so many people, so we traveled to St. Louis to see the lab that performed the tests, and we met the mom leading the charge against this chemical.

Ten wines from the prime growing regions of Napa, Sonoma and Mendocino counties were tested at Microbe Inotech Labs in St. Louis, Mo.

Dan Noyes: "How many of those wines had glyphosate?"

Dr. Bruce Hemming: "All 10 did."

Noyes: "All 10."

Hemming: "All 10."

Hemming and his team have been testing foods and beverages for glyphosate for years. Critics charge that these preliminary tests don't prove there's glyphosate in the wine. Hemming agrees more tests are needed, but stands by his results.

Noyes: "How confident are you that there was glyphosate in this wine?"

Hemming: "Very confident that the glyphosate is present."

Glyphosate is the key ingredient in Roundup, the most popular weed killer in the world. In fact, Noyes found a bottle of it in his own garden supplies at home.

And it's a major tool at most vineyards.

Jennifer Putnam of Napa Valley Grape Growers said, "Roundup prevents the weeds from growing and the weeds can choke out the growth of your vines, they can choke out your irrigation system, that's the whole battle."

For decades, the United States Environmental Protection Agency has considered Roundup and

its active ingredient, glyphosate, safe to consume at low levels. But new research raises questions. Lab rats were given minute amounts of glyphosate daily. They developed cancer and suffered damage to the liver and kidneys. Now, a movement has begun to ban the chemical.

The group behind the testing - a national coalition of mothers who call themselves Moms Across America.

"Glyphosate has been deemed a probable carcinogen by the World Health Organization," says Zen Honeycutt of Moms Across America. "So we're concerned about any level being in our food at all."

Working with Dr. Hemming's lab, they've also found glyphosate in breast milk, urine, and drinking water. Other groups have found it in eggs, oatmeal, bagels, bread and even highly regulated German beer.

The chemical is made by Monsanto. The company challenges the validity of Dr. Hemming's methods, but adds that even if there is glyphosate in California wine, it's far too little to hurt anyone.

Dr. Donna Farmer, Monsanto Toxicologist, told the I-Team, "A person, say a 150-pound person would have to drink around 8,000 regularly sized bottles of wine in one day to meet the allowable daily intake for glyphosate."

But we spoke to scientists who say their own, independent research shows that there are no safe levels for glyphosate, and that Americans are getting way too much of it in their diet.

Dr. Michael Antoniou with Kings College, London said, "Why am I worried because the science including my research in my laboratory is showing that even these incredibly low levels of glyphosate could be a contributing factor to many serious illnesses including cancer."

Some wine growers say they want more scientific testing, but they're already considering changes.

"We've had candid conversations with one another and asked each other, is there a better way to do this?" Jennifer Putman said. "We don't want to be on the wrong side of history."

The state of California has announced it wants to add glyphosate to its list of known carcinogens. Monsanto promptly sued the state to block that move. We'll keep you posted on how that plays out in the courts.

Friday at 6 p.m., we'll introduce you to a woman who shows wine growers how to get rid of chemicals, and embrace the weeds.