U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY
Opening Statement

Ranking Member Zoe Lofgren (D-CA)

Environment Subcommittee Hearing:
Innovations in Agrichemicals: AI's Hidden Formula Driving Efficiency.

May 20th, 2025

Good morning, and thank you, Chairman Franklin and Ranking Member Amo, for holding this informative hearing today.

My district is home to the "salad bowl of the world," which produces more than half of all the leafy greens consumed across the United States. The Salinas Valley is considered one of the most important agricultural hubs in the nation, and its success is due not only to its fertile land but also to the hard work and resilience of the farmers and the farm workers who keep it thriving.

Agrichemicals play a role in sustaining agricultural productivity and food security, but we cannot ignore the possible public health risks that come with widespread chemical use. Chronic exposure to certain pesticides has been linked to cancer, reproductive disorders, and developmental harm. Agricultural workers and communities who live near farms face particularly higher risk because of their proximity to these chemicals.

Today's hearing highlights how artificial intelligence may offer new tools to reduce those risks. AI could potentially help farmers apply chemicals more precisely, target pests more effectively, and ideally reduce the overall amount of chemicals used. That is something that both farm workers and farmers would welcome. I look forward to hearing from our distinguished witnesses about how these innovations can create safer working conditions, improve health outcomes, and support sustainability in agriculture.

However, innovation doesn't happen in a vacuum. AI algorithms depend on robust, reliable data that is verified through rigorous and systematic reviews of human health hazards. The Fiscal Year 2026 so-called skinny budget proposes a substantial cut to the EPA's Office of Research and Development (ORD) funding—essentially eliminating the very office that researches, evaluates, and provides publicly accessible exposure data for over one million chemicals.

Housed in ORD is the Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS) program, which identifies and characterizes the health hazards of chemicals. IRIS is a critical source of toxicity information used by the EPA, state and local health agencies, and international health organizations. The placement of IRIS in ORD was intentional—it ensures that science is insulated from political pressure.

The IRIS program is also critical to government efficiency, which should have been something the so-called Department of Government Efficiency would have supported. But unfortunately, this Administration is more efficient at gutting programs than keeping our constituents healthy.

Even if AI innovations continue to advance, we will lose the ability to make accurate health risk assessments and informed regulatory decisions without a strong scientific foundation. If we handcuff the scientific arm of the EPA, we will discover the consequences of pesticide exposure the hard way—through impact on people who have been exposed.

It doesn't matter how powerful the AI models are if they are based on unreliable or missing data. Using AI to approve new chemicals without the critically necessary scientific health data to ensure they are safe is not innovation. It is recklessness.

I yield back.