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Leading by example with Endosulfan-free produce



A 'cafe' at the venue of the conference of the parties to the Stockholm Convention. Photo: Special Arrangement

*Tea, coffee, and cashew nuts from Kerala too at Geneva 'cafe'*

Health and community organisers from across the globe, including Kerala, are serving Endosulfan-free organic coffee, cashew nuts and chocolate to the delegates to the Conference of the Parties to the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants in Geneva.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have set up a cafe at the venue to showcase Endosulfan-free foods and produce sourced from many countries to show that the toxic pesticide can, and should, be banned worldwide.

The conference will decide whether to include Endosulfan in the Convention and thus ban it in the 173 countries that are parties to the treaty.

The NGO 'cafe' has on its menu Endosulfan-free organic coffee from Brazil, Indonesia, Ethiopia, Costa Rica, Mexico, India, and other countries; organic cashew nuts from India; chocolate made from organic cocoa from various Latin American nations; and organic tea from China, India and Sri Lanka. The tea, coffee, and cashew nuts for the cafe is sourced from 'Elements,' an organic-produce outlet based in Kozhikode, and the organic bazaar being organised by Thanal, an NGO, every week in Thiruvananthapuram.

The NGOs serving the delegates wear T-shirts made from organic cotton grown in India, provided by Pants2Poverty, a company which sources organic cotton from India and West Africa. Some of these produce come from 'Sahaja Aharam' of the Centre for Sustainable Agriculture in Andhra Pradesh. Many other food items, such as soya bean and sugarcane, grown without applying Endosulfan are also on display at the cafe.

The free cafe, which is open at regular intervals throughout the week, is called "The Annex A Cafe" after the section of the Convention in which Endosulfan may be listed for phase-out.

"Among the largest remaining users of Endosulfan are the cotton, soya bean, coffee, chocolate and tea industries in certain countries," explains Karl Tupper, Staff Scientist with the Pesticide Action Network (PAN) North America in a press release.

"By featuring organic examples of these produce from around the world in our cafe, we're demonstrating that Endosulfan-free production is not only possible but also profitable — proving false the claims from the pesticide industry that Endosulfan is necessary for growing these crops."

Innovative farmers, the release says, are using cutting-edge practices to achieve good outputs in key crops in Africa, Asia and Latin America without using Endosulfan. Organic practices are the safest, most-effective and highly productive for growing crops without Endosulfan, says Abou Thiam of PAN Africa.

The Stockholm Convention (also known as the "POPs Treaty") aims to protect human health and the environment by eliminating chemicals that are the "worst of the worst," those that are simultaneously toxic, bio-accumulative, persistent, and mobile in the global environment. Endosulfan has been recommended by the treaty's POPs Review Committee for addition to the list of 21 chemicals already slated for a global phase-out.

"Many less toxic and safer alternatives to Endosulfan are being used successfully around the globe — from cotton farms in West Africa to coffee growers in Latin America to tea plantations in Asia. There is no excuse for keeping a toxic insecticide such as Endosulfan on the market," says Dr. Mariann Lloyd-Smith of the International POPs Elimination Network (IPEN). Many of these alternatives to Endosulfan have been well documented, and the NGOs are making information about them available to meeting delegates.