

Executive Summary

This document presents a panorama of *highly hazardous pesticides* in Mexico. This is a new regulatory category emerging from the context of the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM), and the International Code of Conduct on Pesticide Management, both of which are voluntary. Governments, various specialized UN bodies, industry, and civil society organizations have been participating in this field.

The criteria to define highly hazardous pesticides proposed by experts from the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), in addition to those proposed by the Pesticide Action Network International (PAN International) are used for the national analysis and the case studies. Pesticides presenting one or more of the following intrinsic characteristics of hazardousness have thus been included: high acute toxicity capable of causing damage to health in the short term, or chronic toxicity with long-term effects that could lead to the development of cancer, genetic mutations, reproductive harm, hormonal alterations in humans, or producing harmful environmental effects on aquatic organisms, causing mortality to pollinators, or being included in any of the three international environmental conventions (Stockholm, Rotterdam and the Montreal Protocol).

This report compares PAN International's list of highly hazardous pesticides to the active ingredients authorized by the competent governmental authorities in Mexico. In the first place, it should be noted that 183 active ingredients contained in highly hazardous pesticides have been authorized, as demonstrated in the 2016 Official Pesticide Catalogue of the Federal Commission for the Protection against Sanitary Risk (Comisión Federal de Protección contra Riesgos Sanitarios/COFEPRIS). These active ingredients have been authorized in over 3000 commercial presentations such as insecticides, herbicides, fungicides and fumigants, mainly for agricultural use, although they are also permitted for animal husbandry and farming, forestry, industry, the household, and some are even authorized for use in public health campaigns. Authorization for commercialization is granted to both national companies and transnational corporations in an oligopolistic globalized market. It should also be highlighted that 140 highly hazardous pesticides currently enjoying sanitary registration have been banned in other countries or are not authorized for one or more of its uses.¹

¹ The detailed list of active ingredients contained in highly hazardous pesticides authorized in

In Mexico, highly hazardous pesticides are used both in intensive agriculture, i.e., commercial export-oriented monocrops and agro-industrial chains of the domestic market, and in small-scale crops cultivated by peasants and indigenous communities. This report presents eight case studies in seven different states of the Mexican Republic in which synthetic pesticides are in use. Highly hazardous pesticides have been highlighted through a summary of their effects on health and the environment, which have been researched among the exposed populations. The analyzed cases include the municipalities of Culiacán Valley and northern Sinaloa State, the Yaqui Valley in Sonora State, municipalities specializing in flower greenhouses in the State of Mexico, the Bajío of Guanajuato State, Campeche State, Yucatán State, and the communities in the Highlands of Chiapas State.

The use of highly hazardous pesticides, considering their intrinsic characteristics, represents serious risks to human health and the environment, and violates a series of human rights, such as the right to life, to enjoy the highest level possible of health, and children's and workers' rights to protection, among others. This has been recognized by two United Nations special rapporteurs on human rights: one specializing in hazardous chemicals and waste and the other on the right to adequate food. The great number of highly hazardous pesticides that have been authorized in Mexico, in spite of being banned in other countries, the damage documented in some of the studies presented in this report, the lack of control over aerial pesticide spraying, the deficiency of adequate and trustworthy environmental monitoring, particularly of the water and soil, and the impact on biodiversity, especially on pollinators are all causes for deep concern.

Fortunately, there exist alternatives to the use of synthetic pesticides in Mexico. Over 100 crops have been certified organic and the experiences of agroecological pest management promoted by both university level institutions devoted to agricultural research and peasant organizations are increasing, although greater governmental support is required.

Recommendations

In the face of this issue, the report presents two main recommendations that demand a change in the public policies both federal and state authorities devote to pesticides. These recommendations must be enriched with proposals made by peasant, indigenous, and agricultural worker organizations:

Mexico, as well as those banned or unauthorized in other countries is presented in two annexes at the end of this book.

- 1) to change the pesticide management policy in Mexico so that it primarily focuses on the promotion, respect, protection and assurance of the right to health, to a healthy environment and healthy, sufficient and adequate food; so that it enables the construction of an ecologically sustainable food system and complies with the constitutional obligation to protect human rights in accordance with the principles of universality, interdependence, indivisibility and progressiveness.
- 2) to develop a ***National Plan for the Reduction and Phasing-Out of Highly Hazardous Pesticides and Support for Agroecological Alternatives***. This plan must contain goals regarding the reduction and banning of highly hazardous pesticides (above all those banned in other countries) that may be evaluated and monitored at a local and state level in specific territories. The plan must also promote agroecological alternatives for the control of pests, undesirable plants (weeds) and diseases. This could strengthen the domestic market, reduce Mexico's food dependence and contribute to the recovery of food sovereignty.

This plan requires a change in the regulatory framework and policies in order to be able to achieve the greatest level of human rights protection, strengthening the prevention and reparation of damage to exposed populations, including agricultural workers, communities and consumers. For this purpose, it is necessary to incorporate the recommendations made by the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food at the United Nation's Human Rights Council in its 34th regular session, included in Annex III of this book. It is necessary, in particular, to strengthen access to justice in health, environmental, labor and human rights matters related to pesticide use with participation from civil society groups interested in ending impunity and promoting effective protection of the rights involved. Attention must also be placed on the recommendations of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, issued on June 5, 2015, for the Mexican State to ban the importation and use of any pesticide that has been banned or restricted for use in the exporting country.

Such a plan must be developed and implemented in a transparent and participatory manner in order to ensure that it aims toward the common good, rather than private interests. The Interdepartmental Commission for Control over the Processing and Use of Pesticides, Fertilizers and Toxic Substances (Comisión Intersecretarial para el Control del Proceso y Uso de Plaguicidas, Fertilizantes y Sustancias Tóxicas/CICOPLAFEST) would participate in this process in coordination with an interdisciplinary collegiate group of academic specialists, agricultural research centers, non-governmental organizations that do not have conflicts of interest with industry, together with organizations of peasants, indigenous communities, private producers and agricultural workers. At the end of this report, appear details of the measures that could be included in this plan.

Through the actions we are proposing, Mexico would contribute to achieving SAICM's goal so that by the year 2020 chemicals can be produced and used in such a way that their adverse effects on health and the environment are significantly reduced. In addition, these actions would make it possible to comply with the resolution on highly hazardous pesticides passed by the Fourth International Conference on Chemicals Management, which recommended prioritizing agroecological alternatives.

Similarly, the measures we recommend will contribute to achieving the second Sustainable Development Goal 2015-2030, in particular, the attainment of food production system sustainability and the application of resilient agricultural practices that increase not only productivity but also production, contribute to maintaining ecosystems, strengthen the capacity to adapt to climate change, and progressively improve soil and earth quality.