CETAAR RAP-AL Argentina

Executive Summary

In this project we set out to carry out awareness-raising, training and political advocacy tasks on the problems derived from the use of Highly Hazardous Pesticides (HHPs) and on their replacement by agroecological strategies and practices in Argentina. It was carried out together with institutions, organizations and media located in 15 districts of the province of Buenos Aires, in two of the provinces of Córdoba, and in a community of the province of Misiones, Santiago del Estero, and the Autonomous city of Buenos Aires.

The general goal we have proposed for the project we are developing is to contribute to ban / replace HHPs with agroecological strategies and practices based on achieving four specific objectives: 1) To influence both decision-makers and officials related to promoting agroecology (institutions and Ministries, etc.) regarding pesticide registration and use; 2) To sensitize communities about the socio-environmental effects of HHPs; 3) To inform/train producers in agroecological strategies and practices; 4) To comprehensively identify the support agroecology is receiving at a public policy level. In order to achieve these objectives, a series of activities have been planned, taking into account the restrictions that the coronavirus pandemic has imposed on travel and human movement. Throughout the pandemic, activities involving the mass media, as well as the use of new information technologies, such as Zoom and Meet video conferencing platforms, have intensified. During the pandemic, public policies favoring monocropping expansion have continued unabated, even seeming to increase. For instance, imports of chemical precursors for pesticides were tax exempted, GMO wheat was approved for sale, and agreements were reached with China to set up megafarms. Noteworthy is an initiative referred to as “200 million tons” which seeks to increase grain production (cereals, oilseeds and vegetables) through not only intensifying the use of chemical technologies, but also reformulating the seed law and rediscussing the limitations on pesticide use established in local regulations.

Paradoxically, with the goal of reducing complaints by both social and producer organizations, the Argentinian government created the Agroecology Office as part of the Ministry of Agriculture. It also established a Main Office within the Ministry of Family Agriculture that promotes the agroecological production of seeds. It is evident that these initiatives, in addition to support provided by provinces such as Buenos Aires and Misiones, are insufficient in relation to the way in which monocropping and its associated inputs are moving forward. Finally, pandemic times make it possible to rethink comprehensive health conditions not only from the perspective of pesticide exposure, but also as part of the search for higher quality food. For this reason, some environmental organizations have sought to place a limit on pesticide spraying through imposing regulatory sanctions and promoting agroecological production.

Comparing the list of pesticides registered and used in Argentina[3] to PAN International's list,[4] it is possible to state that of the 445 active ingredients registered in Argentina, 126, i.e., 28 %, are included in the PAN list. Of these 126 chemicals, three are for industrial use: chromated copper borate, chromated copper arsenate, and creosote oil. The other 123 chemicals are used in both intensive and extensive agricultural activities, as well as household cleaning, gardening, and sanitation campaigns. These chemicals are imported and produced by different companies and are marketed under different brands. The concentration of the chemicals' active ingredients and presentation therefore vary. Concerning the pesticides' characteristics and their relationship to human health, of the 123 HHPs authorized and used for agricultural activities in Argentina, 13 have high acute toxicity, i.e., 10.5%. 24 of them, i.e., 19.5%, are fatal if inhaled. As far as chronic toxicity is concerned, according to the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), 32 of the authorized pesticides are probably carcinogenic to humans (26% of the total number of HHPs), another two (1.6%) have been classified as carcinogenic or probably carcinogenic by institutions such as IARC, EPA or the EU; according to the criteria of the Globally Harmonized System accepted by the European Union, 25 pesticides are considered endocrine disruptors (20%); 15 pesticides cause reproductive toxicity (12%) and two (1.6 %) are mutagenic.

Considering the environmental toxicity of the HHPs authorized in Argentina, 46 of them, i.e., 37%, are highly bioaccumulative, thus affecting the food chain, including birds and carnivorous mammals, whereas 12 pesticides (9.7%) are highly toxic for aquatic bodies, placing the ecosystem's wildlife diversity at risk. These pesticides include Pirimicarb and Propargite used in fruit tree production. Fruit trees tend to be grown close to rivers and streams in order to to have easy access to water for irrigation. Regarding soil, water, and sediments, 6 pesticides, i.e., 4.9% of the total, are highly persistent in such milieus and may affect all living beings.

Pesticides that are authorized in Argentina, but are banned or unauthorized in other countries, contain 140 active ingredients. Of this total, 33 active ingredients (24%) are highly hazardous pesticides that are banned or unauthorized in other countries, according to criteria established by the FAO/WHO group of experts. If additional criteria proposed by PAN International are considered, then the number of highly hazardous pesticides would increase to 91 (65%). The chemicals used, the way in which they are applied, the producers' and workers' living and working conditions, as well as the conditions of exposure of residents in rural and peri-urban communities converge in the outbreak of acute and chronic diseases as a result of pesticide poisoning.

Diverse research studies conducted in Argentina report on the effect that pesticides have on socio-environmental health and how the members of affected communities seek to curb pesticide application. This study describes the actions and achievements of several communities in Argentina including: Pergamino in the province of Buenos Aires, the Ituzaingó mothers in Córdoba, and groups of teachers and environmentalists in the province of Entre Ríos. In most cases, the communities have filed complaints through the judicial system and have obtained decisions that limit the applications and/or establish restrictions on the chemicals to be used.

[3] SENASA Lista de activos web. Consulted on February 12, 2021.

[4] PAN International List of Highly Hazardous Pesticides (PAN List of HHPs) March 2019, Pesticide Action Network International. Consulted in March, 2021.

This report analyzes the regulatory framework regarding the demarcation and support to the productive modes, practices, and technologies encompassed under the term ecological agriculture. First, it examines the guidelines and actions related to the production and registration of bio-inputs as a strategy to replace pesticide use. It then proceeds to address national legislation governing organic agriculture, culminating with the progress achieved at a regulatory level related to agroecology (provincial laws and local regulations). We understand agroecology as a paradigm through which we aim to perceive, reflect, and act within our agrarian reality by re-integrating into nature and based on this reintegration to reweave the ties between human beings and the inner harmony existing in each living being. We aim to reinstate the balance through establishing and enriching the ongoing flows, cycles, and relationships between the components of agroecosystems, the cosmos, and the society in which we live.