

NEWS IN BRIEF AGRICULTURE

The U.S. is still using many pesticides that are banned in other countries

Most phased-out chemicals in the nation are discontinued by industry, not the EPA



PERSISTANT PESTICIDES The United States is lagging behind other agricultural nations in banning potentially harmful pesticides, such as chloropicrin, a study suggests. MARMADUKE ST. JOHN/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

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Compared with other global agricultural powerhouses, the United States has lax restrictions on potentially harmful pesticides, a study suggests.

An analysis of agricultural pesticide regulations reveals that the United States widely [uses several chemicals that are banned or being phased out](#) in the European Union, Brazil and China — three of the world's other leading pesticide users.

What's more, most agricultural pesticides phased out in the United States are discontinued by the pesticide industry, rather than banned by the Environmental Protection Agency. Environmental health researcher Nathan Donley with the Center for Biological Diversity, an environmental group in Portland, Ore., reports these findings online June 7 in *Environmental Health*.

Donley reviewed the approval status of over 500 pesticides that have been used in the United States. Currently, 72, 17 and 11 pesticides approved in the United States are banned or being phased out in the EU, Brazil and China, respectively. These include chemicals that have been implicated in pesticide poisonings in the United States, like chloropicrin and [paraquat](#) (*SN*: 3/26/11, p. 26). Only two, three and two pesticides banned in the United States are approved in the EU, Brazil and China.

Using the U.S. Geological Survey's record of estimated annual pesticide use, Donley determined how much U.S. agriculture uses pesticides outlawed elsewhere. Of the 544 million kilograms of pesticides used in the country in 2016, 146 million, 12 million and 18 million kilograms comprised chemicals banned in the EU, Brazil and China.

Since the EPA was formed in 1970, 134 pesticides have been discontinued in the United States. The EPA prohibited 37 of those, and only five in the last 18 years. Pesticide manufacturers voluntarily withdrew the other 97. In many cases, this is likely because the pesticides sold poorly, and it's expensive to maintain EPA approval, Donley suggests. Several chemicals showed a steep decline in usage before cancellation.

The imbalance between voluntary cancellations and government regulations creates a bias toward pesticide use in the United States based on economic factors, rather than health and environmental risks, Donley argues. Voluntary phaseouts can also drag on far longer than the one-year grace period typical of government-imposed bans.

CITATIONS

N. Donley. [The USA lags behind other agricultural nations in banning harmful pesticides](#). *Environmental Health*. Published online, June 7, 2019. doi: 10.1186/s12940-019-0488-0.