

Pesticide use around world almost doubles since 1990, report finds

Agricultural chemicals drive falls of 30% in populations of field birds and butterflies, says Pesticide Atlas



A tractor sprays pesticides on wheat crops in Brazil. Photograph: Rodolfo Bühner/Reuters

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Global pesticide use has soared by 80% since 1990, with the world market set to hit \$130bn next year, according to a new **Pesticide Atlas**.

But pesticides are also responsible for an estimated 11,000 human fatalities and the poisoning of 385 million people every year, the report finds.

Their use has hit biodiversity, driving falls of around 30% in populations of field birds and grassland butterflies since 1990. Almost **one in 10** of Europe's bees are now threatened with extinction, due in no small part to the use of toxic chemical formulations in herbicides, pesticides and fertilisers.

Clara Bourgin, a campaigner at Friends of the Earth Europe, one of the groups that compiled the atlas, said: "The evidence is staggering; the current food

system based on the heavy use of poisonous chemicals is gravely failing farmers and consumers and feeding biodiversity collapse. The EU needs to stop shutting its eyes to the agribusinesses' increasingly toxic trade and listen to its citizens instead.”

The EU has long been torn between attempts to balance reductions in the damage caused by pesticides and demands for their continued use from farming lobbies.



Farm-fresh or toxic? Australia's use of pesticides

Last week, an EU committee **failed to agree** on a one-year extension for glyphosate, the key ingredient in Bayer's best-selling Roundup herbicide. The current authorisation for the controversial product is due to run out in mid-December.

A European Commission spokesperson said it would now bring its case before an EU appeals committee “as soon as possible”. He said: “We have to abide by our legal obligation to extend the approval and that's what we are doing,” but declined to comment on what would happen if the appeal was turned down.

The EU has already relaxed **some of its green agriculture rules**, arguing earlier this year that food security had to take precedence as the Ukraine war heated up.

Now several EU states have set their sights on **reassessing** a promise to halve pesticide use and risks by 2030 from the bloc's flagship Farm to Fork strategy.

Ariel Brunner, the policy chief of BirdLife Europe, said: "The farm lobby is cynically exploiting Russian aggression in Ukraine to try and keep us on the road to ecological collapse. The European Commission must resist the siren songs, defend its Green Deal and push for the deep changes farming needs to survive the gathering ecological and climate crisis."

A quarter of all pesticides are sold in the EU, which is also the world's top exporter of crop protection products. However, EU laws currently allow the export of toxic weedkillers banned on the continent to developing countries with weaker regulations.

In 2018, European agrochemical companies planned to export 81,000 tonnes of pesticides prohibited on their own fields, the atlas says. In the same year, more than 40% of all pesticides used in Mali and Kenya were found to be highly hazardous, as were 65% of all pesticides used in four states of Nigeria.

The commission **pledged** to try to end shipments of the toxic cargoes as **part of its Green Deal** of 2020 but a legislative proposal is notably absent from a leaked commission work programme for 2023, seen by the Guardian.



Toxic 'forever chemicals' detected in commonly used insecticides in US, study finds

In an angry [tweet](#) to the EU's environment commissioner on Monday, Michèle Rivasi, a veteran Green MEP, denounced the exports as “an environmental bomb and a violation of human rights”.

Of the 385m pesticide poisoning cases logged in the atlas, 255m were in Asia and more than 100m in Africa, but just 1.6m were in Europe.

Rivasi told the Guardian: “I am furious and very disappointed because the commission was committed to proposing a text that would stop the export of the banned pesticides. We are complicit in the deaths of people and I find that unacceptable.”

A [legal opinion](#) by the Center for International Environmental Law published last month found that EU exports of banned pesticides to Africa and Central America violated the bloc's international legal obligations and human rights law.

The European Commission was approached for comment on the export of banned pesticides.