

Can I Trust the World Health Organization on Glyphosate (Roundup)?

I've been advocating to eliminate glyphosate and other toxic pesticides to my local officials, and I've made some good progress. But right now, I need to push back against claims from some decision makers that IARC and the World Health Organization can't be trusted when they say glyphosate is carcinogenic. Can you provide me with some additional background about how the decision was made? And are there other countries or organizations that have agreed with their assessment?

Carol, Rochester, NY

Carol,

The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) is an agency within the United Nations' World Health Organization. Since 1965, IARC has been the leading international body in making scientific determinations identifying carcinogenic hazards to humans. IARC employs a "strength of evidence" assessment, basing the carcinogenicity of a chemical on whether it is capable of increasing the occurrence of malignant growths, reducing their latency (time between exposure and the onset of cancer), or increasing the severity or multiplicity of such growths. Prior to classifying a chemical, 17 experts from 11 countries analyze scientific studies and data for approximately one year before meeting together in a Working Group in an attempt to reach a consensus evaluation. Consideration is given to exposure data, studies of cancer in humans, studies of cancer in experimental animals, and mechanistic and other relevant data.

IARC's classification of glyphosate as a group 2A probable carcinogen has been subject to intense criticism from compromised regulatory bodies and the chemical industry. IARC has responded to criticisms of its evaluation process through a response document. (See "IARC response to criticisms of the Monographs and the glyphosate evaluation," prepared by the IARC Director, January 2018.) It notes, "Since the evaluation of glyphosate by the IARC Monographs Program in March 2015, the Agency has been subject to unprecedented, coordinated efforts to undermine the evaluation, the program and the organization. These efforts have deliberately and repeatedly misrepresented the Agency's work. The attacks have largely originated from the agrochemical industry and associated media outlets."

Unfortunately, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has joined the agrochemical industry in these attacks. One EPA official within the Office of Pesticide Programs infamously told a Monsanto employee, "If I can kill this I should get a medal," related to his attempts to quash a separate health-based evaluation of glyphosate by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Despite the attempts of an apparently corrupt EPA official, DHHS' Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) released its first draft on the Toxicological Profile for Glyphosate. Top-line



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findings were consistent with IARC's conclusions on the carcinogenicity of glyphosate. Importantly, cancer was not the only subject in ATSDR's review of glyphosate. It also reviewed the chemical's effects on: body weight, pulmonary and cardiovascular health, gastrointestinal and nervous systems, kidney and liver, skeletal system, endocrine system, effects on the immune system, developmental and reproductive systems, and the eyes and skin.

Particular to glyphosate, the Danish government has concurred with IARC's cancer determination, Austria has moved to ban the chemical, France is phasing the chemical out by 2021, Germany is phasing use out by 2023, and the Netherlands has imposed significant restrictions. In regard to pesticide use in general, over 140 communities in the U.S. have enacted pesticide reform laws, restricting the use of toxic pesticides in a manner that best protects their residents' health and the local environment.

We hope your local leaders find this information helpful in wading through the intense lobbying and propaganda pushed out by the chemical industry in an attempt to challenge grassroots efforts like your own. Be confident that the precautionary approach that you're advocating is the best way to protect public health and the environment from hazardous chemical exposure, and the correct choice for the future of land management in your community.

SHARE WITH US!

Beyond Pesticides welcomes your questions, comments, and concerns. Have something you'd like to share or ask us? We'd like to know! If we think something might be particularly useful for others, we will print your comments in this section. Mail will be edited for length and clarity, and we will not publish your contact information. There are many ways you can contact us: Send us an email at info@beyondpesticides.org, give us a call at 202-543-5450, or send questions and comments to: 701 E Street SE, Washington, DC 20003.

Feeding the World with Organic Agriculture

I recently saw a news article that talked about how organic can't feed the world. It said yields are too low and that we'd need more land than is available to match what "conventional" (chemical-intensive) can provide. Is organic really the answer if it can't feed the world?

Medha, Red Bluff, CA

Medha,

What's often lost in the discussion over whether one form of agriculture or another can "feed the world" is that we're not currently feeding the world. The United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that at least 820 million people don't have enough to eat; 15 million of those people reside in the United States. So to start, if we do intend to feed the world, we have a lot of work to do to ensure that everyone has access to food.

Further, and specific to the U.S., a lot of conventional food currently being grown is not reaching consumer plates. It's going into gas tanks in the form of corn ethanol or soybean biodiesel. Organic versions of these crops are generally not being used for these purposes. This points to an urgent need to readjust farming incentives and subsidies that drive chemical-intensive monocrop production over research and additional funding for diversified organic systems.

Studies comparing chemical-intensive to organic crop production have varied results, but there are generally indications that for most food commodities, organic can match or come close to conventional systems. It varies by the crop being investigated, and on-farm production methods, but an important context within this discussion goes back to government supports. Reports indicate that over \$20 billion in subsidies go to farming annually, with about 39% of farms receiving government funds. The vast majority of these subsidies are not going to small-scale organic farmers, but rather to the industrial agricultural row crop (corn, soybean, wheat, cotton, rice) producers. The same chemical industry arguing that organic farming isn't competitive is spending millions of dollars lobbying lawmakers to tilt the playing in ways that hold back organic growth, from research investments in chemical-intensive practices to allowances of harmful chemical residues in our food and water. Deliberate public investments into research and development for organic farming is certain to result in further breakthroughs in yield and efficiency.

As a 2017 United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization report found, "Without or with minimal use of toxic chemicals, it is possible to produce healthier, nutrient-rich food, with higher yields in the longer term, without polluting and exhausting environmental resources." We can "feed the world" through organic practices. But in order to do so we need to demand changes that prioritize public health and environmental protection and make larger investments in alternative farming systems.

FROM THE WEB

Beyond Pesticides' Daily News Blog features a post each weekday on the health and environmental hazards of pesticides, pesticide regulation and policy, pesticide alternatives, and cutting-edge science, www.beyondpesticides.org/dailynewsblog. Want to get in on the conversation? "Like" us on Facebook, www.facebook.com/beyondpesticides, or send us a "tweet" on Twitter, @bpncamp!

Excerpt from Beyond Pesticides Daily News Blog

(11/26/2019): Bayer Monsanto Skirts Felony Charge for Applying Banned Pesticide in Hawaii, by Calling on Connections at Justice Department. Bayer Monsanto endangered public health and the environment by knowingly storing and applying the highly hazardous and banned insecticide methyl parathion in Maui, Hawaii, according to a release from the U.S. Attorney's office for the Central District of California.

Nikki comments via Facebook: No way, this has to stop. Corporations and their managers MUST be held accountable and charged with crimes. No more evasion.

Kate comments via Twitter: A drop in the bucket for them and they are still spreading illegal poisons, impacting human and environmental well-being. Failure of justice.

Excerpt from Beyond Pesticides Daily News Blog

(12/10/2019): EPA Gives Go-Ahead for Mass Poisoning of Fox, Coyote, and other Wildlife Predators. Thousands of fox, coyote, and other carnivores will continue to be poisoned to death by hydrogen cyanide after the Trump Administration's Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) re-approved the use of M-44 "cyanide bombs" earlier this month.

David comments: Additionally, the removal of predators allows their prey to spiral out of control unchecked, creating ecosystem imbalance, and a ripple effect will occur as the food sources of lesser wildlife become threatened.

Darcy comments: This practice is ridiculous! Allowing hunting on the overpopulated species I can see, but blindly killing anything that comes into contact with the poison is ludicrous. Wildlife, pets, children cannot read the warnings!

Shirley comments: This is outrageous! EPA seems to get totally unstrung over the smallest thing—but putting off very toxic bombs to have animals die a terrible death—is okay? I don't think so. Where is the sensible reasoning in this tactic? Chemical Poisons Reduction Act of 2019 is certainly necessary if EPA can't be logical on the subject themselves. Knowing what I know about EPA—this procedure they are advocating is truly obscene and INSANE.