

Farmworkers and Pesticides

A Fact Sheet from Toxic Free NC

Because of their long working hours, unsafe working conditions, and constant exposure to agricultural chemicals like pesticides, **farmworkers have one of the most dangerous jobs in America.**

Pesticides are poisons designed to kill living things. Exposure to pesticides – even at low levels – can cause health risks. Farmworkers are at increased risk of many health problems as a result of their exposure to pesticides.

Farmworker families are also at risk. Because pesticides can contaminate work clothes, hair, and even skin, pesticides are brought into the home when parents return from work. Pesticides can also drift into the home from spraying in nearby fields. Children are especially sensitive to pesticides because they are still developing. Children whose parents work in agriculture are more likely to have pesticides in their bodies.

A recent study in California found that among Latinos, farmworkers were more likely to develop certain types of leukemia by 59%, stomach cancer by 70%, cervical cancer by 63%, and uterine cancer by 68% (*CA Cancer Registry, 2002*). Other studies of farm workers and farm families show decreased levels of fertility, and higher levels of problems like birth defects and miscarriages in these families.

Current laws are not enough. The US EPA Worker Protection Standards require that the growers who employ farmworkers take specific steps to protect their health and safety, including:

- Protective equipment such as masks and gloves.
- Trainings on pesticide safety topics.
- Hand and eye wash stations in the fields with clean water.

These standards are not enough to protect farmworkers. Many growers routinely violate the standards, causing illnesses which often go unreported. Farmworker organizations and other advocates are currently working with the US EPA to improve the standards, and to make sure that they are enforced.

What you can do:

- Buy organic products that do not use harmful pesticides.
- Boycott companies that exploit farmworkers – get the latest from the National Farmworker Ministry at www.nfwm.org
- Support organizations like FLOC and the United Farm Workers who work for farmworker justice.



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