

Key Body Demands Complete Ban on Glyphosate in India

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In October 2020, Pesticide Action Network India and PAN Asia Pacific released the report ‘State of Glyphosate Use in India’. It concluded that the use of the world’s most widely used herbicide is rampant. Despite this, it noted that its disturbing effects on the environment and the health of farmworkers and the public are not being addressed (see: [State of Glyphosate Use in India | Pesticide Action Network \(PAN\) India \(pan-india.org\)](#)).

Although Punjab, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and several other states have moved towards banning glyphosate due to their concerns for consumers, farmers and environment, the report – based on a field survey in seven states (300 respondents – 30 retailers, 270 farmers/farmworkers) – noted at least 20 non-approved uses of glyphosate, with 16 of them in food crops.

It concluded:

“In the light of mounting evidences on the unacceptable health and environmental outcomes of glyphosate, the ground reality of its use in India is seen as an ‘anarchic’ scenario. This would have undesirable impacts on soil health, farm productivity, food safety, agriculture trade, public health as well as environmental wellbeing in the country. The scenario of glyphosate use thus necessitates the urgent need of eliminating it from India.”

The report documented many disturbing features of glyphosate use, not least in terms of its impacts on farmers and farmworkers.

Now in December 2021, the influential Swadeshi Jagaran Manch (SJM) has demanded a complete ban on the use of glyphosate in India, arguing it is carcinogenic and damages ecology and that it adversely impacts cultivators and their livelihoods.

The SJM has close ties to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and has consistently

adopted a critical stance on the government's pro-foreign direct investment policies and the 'globalisation' (dependency) agenda.

National Co-convenor of the SJM Ashwani Mahajan recently submitted a petition with 201,609 signatures of people favouring a complete ban on glyphosate to Union Minister for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Narendra Singh Tomar.

The organisation argues that the government's stated intent to restrict (not ban) the use of glyphosate (see [Government moves to restrict use of glyphosate – The Hindu BusinessLine](#)) is meaningless.

The SJM informed the agriculture minister that, though there is a restriction on the use of glyphosate (aside from on tea plantations and non-crop areas), the weedicide is blatantly being used for illegally grown genetically engineered herbicide tolerant (HT) cotton. It added that this has been going on for years with the full knowledge of the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee and the state governments.

The minister was informed that, at present, some "miscreant seed companies" are trying to illegally spread HT Bt cotton, on hundreds of thousands of acres of land, to promote the use of glyphosate.

The SJM says glyphosate is being used both for weed control and to desiccate crops prior to harvesting and there is a strong opposition to this as the weedicide and its adjuvants are absorbed by the plant and consumed by humans.

Glyphosate is a known carcinogen and endocrine disruptor and is linked with several serious illnesses. The SJM informed the minister that there are more than 100,000 cases pending against Monsanto/Bayer company for damages by the users of its glyphosate based herbicide after they (the litigants) developed 10 different types of cancer, including non-Hodgkins Lymphoma. The herbicide has been declared carcinogenic by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC).

Despite this, the push to get illegal HT genetically engineered crops into Indian fields persists. In 2017, for instance, the illegal cultivation of HT soybean was reported in Gujarat. There are also reports of [HT cotton illegally being cultivated in the country](#).

In [a 2017 paper](#) in the Journal of Peasant studies, Glenn Stone and Andrew Flachs show how cotton farmers have been encouraged to change their ploughing practices, which has led to more weeds being left in their fields. The authors suggest the outcome in terms of yields (or farmer profit) is arguably no better than before. However, it (conveniently) coincides with the appearance of an increasing supply of HT cotton seeds.

Stone and Flachs observe:

"The challenge for agrocaptial is how to break the dependence on double-lining and ox-weeding to open the door to herbicide-based management.... how could farmers be pushed onto an herbicide-intensive path?"

They show how farmers are indeed being nudged onto such a path via the change in practices and also note the potential market for herbicide growth alone in India is huge. Writing in 2017, the authors note that sales could soon reach USD 800 million with scope for

even greater expansion. Little wonder we therefore see the appearance of HT seeds in the country. These seeds are designed to be used with glyphosate or other similar toxic agrochemicals such as glufosinate.

A report in the Indian press (June 2021) ([Sale of illegal HT Bt cotton seeds doubles – The Hindu](#)) states that the illegal cultivation of HT Bt cotton has seen a huge jump over a 12-month period, with seed manufacturers claiming that the sale of illegal seed packets had more than doubled. Industry lobbyists had been openly encouraging farmers to plant the seeds in violation of government regulations.

Industry lobbyists and industry-funded scientists often refer to regulatory agencies across the globe which have approved the use of glyphosate in their attempts to invalidate calls for imposing a ban. But if we turn to Europe, long-time campaigner against glyphosate Dr Rosemary Mason says:

“The only reason it has to date remained on the market in Europe is because of the companies behind the European Glyphosate Renewal Group (GRG).”

The GRG is a collection of companies seeking the renewal of the EU authorisation of glyphosate in 2022. Its current members are Albaugh Europe SARL, Barclay Chemicals Manufacturing Ltd., Bayer Agriculture bvba, Ciech Sarzyna S.A., Industrias Afrasa S.A., Nufarm GMBH & Co.KG, Sinon Corporation and Syngenta Crop Protection AG.

In the run up to the decision on whether to relicence glyphosate in 2022, Mason adds:

“These member companies joined forces to prepare a dossier with scientific studies and information on the safety of glyphosate. This dossier was submitted to the evaluating member states and the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) as part of the EU regulatory procedure to continue the authorisation of glyphosate and glyphosate-containing products on the EU market.”

It is telling that researcher Claire Robinson (see: [Glyphosate: EU assessment report excludes most of the scientific literature from its analysis \(gmwatch.org\)](#)) now notes that the preliminary EU report on glyphosate prepared by the Dutch, Hungarian, French and Swedish (the states tasked with evaluating glyphosate) regulators, failed to take into account the overwhelming majority of studies published in the scientific literature.

Robinson notes that of the 1,550 studies on the toxicity of glyphosate that the organisation Générations Futures [found](#) had been published in the literature over the last ten years, only 11 were deemed reliable by the evaluating states. Of the 1,614 ecotoxicity studies identified, once again only 11 were considered reliable. The rate is even lower for endocrine disruption effects: out of 4,024 published studies, only eight are considered reliable by the evaluating states.

Générations Futures notes that the studies presented by the manufacturers were treated with greater leniency and ended up forming the basis of their (the evaluating member states) assessment – in spite of there being “significant methodological flaws”.

Key studies indicating the toxicity of glyphosate from Asia or South America were not accounted for in the evaluation.

Robinson asks:

“Are the studies provided by pesticide manufacturers in support of the glyphosate re-authorisation application subject to the same scrutiny?”

She goes on to explain that this has not been the case. The system is designed to favour the manufacturers.

Rosemary Mason has been compiling data and citing official and peer reviewed reports on glyphosate for more than a decade. In her dozens of reports (on the [academia.edu website](https://academia.edu)), she has been documenting the devastating health and environmental impacts of glyphosate.

In an era defined by the notion of ‘protecting public health’ and ‘flattening the curve’ to reduce the strain on health services, it must be asked why the agrochemical companies are granted free rein to continue to roll out their health damaging products that – as Mason and many others show – are fuelling a decades-long spiralling public health crisis and result in burdening health services.

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