Mission & History

Our Mission

Pesticide Action Network North America (PAN North America) works to replace the use of hazardous pesticides with ecologically sound and socially just alternatives. As one of five PAN Regional Centers worldwide, we link local and international consumer, labor, health, environment and agriculture groups into an international citizens' action network. This network challenges the global proliferation of pesticides, defends basic rights to health and environmental quality, and works to ensure the transition to a just and viable society.

PAN North America: The First 30 Years

In 1982, the luster of the "Green Revolution" had faded. The promised dramatic increases in yields from "miracle" hybrid grains that required high inputs of water, chemical fertilizers and pesticides failed to deliver and were revealed as campaigns to sell technology to people who couldn't afford it. The global pesticide trade was, however, yielding dramatic profits as more and more farmers were trapped on a pesticide treadmill.

That was the world when PAN was founded.

Chemical-intensive, mono-crop, irrigated agriculture, introduced in the Global South in the 1950s, boosted crop yields at first, but by the '70s, the costs in health, ecological damage, and lost biodiversity were mounting—and pests were growing resistant to pesticides. Meanwhile, transnational corporations and local elites profited at the expense of local communities who were losing control over their own food systems. Women and children shouldered more of the fieldwork—and bore the brunt of the pesticide exposure.

In the years since PAN was founded, the Green Revolution has been reassessed and new approaches have been added. When rice production was collapsing in the 1980s due to pest resurgence from resistance to pesticides, Indonesia needed alternatives. A combination of community-scale peer-learning projects recaptured Indigenous farming knowledge and wove it into new ecological pest management. "Farmer Field Schools"—today adapted to local needs in many countries—returned bountiful crops of rice while expenditures on agrichemicals were slashed. Meanwhile, Indonesia and other countries began banning PAN's "Dirty Dozen Pesticides." By 2002, more than a million Indonesian farmers had participated in Field Schools that became models for localized sustainable agriculture in other countries.

But the companies that profited from the Green Revolution—today consolidated into six mega-corporations—were opening a second front in their ongoing effort to control the world's food supply. The "Gene Revolution" is designed to make farmers dependent on patented seeds "owned" by the corporations. Many of these biotech seeds are genetically engineered to withstand heavier applications of proprietary herbicides produced by the same transnationals. The goal is to colonize nature while perpetuating the pesticide treadmill. Many governments have rejected GM seed, and peoples' movements are fighting back.

PAN North America links these struggles in the Global South with similar battles in our own region. On Native lands, inside urban canyons and across the face of rural America, our scientists and partners are testing the air for pesticide drift and water for pesticide pollution. We're joining neighbors from Canada to Mexico in resisting further imposition of genetically engineered crops. And we're helping create a domestic Fair Trade movement to support family farms and guarantee living wages and safer conditions for farmworkers. Our commitment is to a truly green revolution, one that includes not only a sustainable agriculture, but most important, expansion of human rights to food,

justice and self-determination.

PAN's current work

A brief overview of PAN North America's fiscal year 2011-2012 program and finances is available to download:

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