Brazil: more GE crops, more pesticides

Apr 27, 2011 by Pesticide Action Network

Since 2008, Brazil has held the dubious distinction of spending more on pesticides than anyplace else on earth. But what has the country's farmers, public health professionals and environmental advocates even more worried is Brazil's corresponding rise in planting of genetically engineered (GE) crops, engineered to tolerate mega-doses of herbicides like glyphosate (Roundup). And these crops are driving emergence of herbicide-tolerant "superweeds".

The pesticide industry's answer: produce more new (in some cases old) and potentially more toxic herbicides in a weed-control arms race that shows no signs of abating.

In 2009, Dow obtained permission from Brazil’s national authority responsible for assessing and authorizing GE crops to undertake field tests for a new soy variety resistant to the herbicide 2,4-D. This is the same chemical that was a component of Agent Orange used in Vietnam. This year, agrochemical giants BASF and Monsanto launched a new partnership to develop more herbicide-tolerant GE crops.

The technological "fix" is leading to increasing use of herbicides and corresponding increases in poisoning of the Brazilian environment and people. In a 2011 study published by Brazil’s Federal University of Mato Grosso, high pesticide residues have been documented in Brazilian human breast milk, water, air and soil.

Brazilian farmers, health and environmental NGOs, and student groups have responded by launching the "Permanent Campaign Against Agrochemicals and For Life to protest the corporate takeover of their agriculture and spiraling contamination. Their proposal: “In the context of climate change, energy crises and the depletion of natural resources, producing healthy food based on agroecological principles, on small farm properties, respecting nature and workers, is the only viable way of ensuring a better quality of life for current and future generations."

For more detail, download Update from the GM-Free Brazil Campaign from PAN partner AS-PTA in Rio de Janeiro.

Source URL: http://www.panna.org/blog/brazil-more-ge-crops-more-pesticides