

USA lags behind EU, Brazil and China in banning harmful pesticides

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Many pesticides that have been banned or are being phased out in the EU, Brazil and China, are still widely used in the USA, according to a study published in the open access journal *Environmental Health*.

Study author Nathan Donley at the Center for Biological Diversity, USA

said: "The USA is generally regarded as being highly regulated and having protective pesticide safeguards in place. This study contradicts that narrative and finds that in fact, in the last couple of decades, nearly all pesticide cancellations in the USA have been done voluntarily by the pesticide industry. Without a change in the US Environmental Protection Agency's current reliance on voluntary mechanisms for cancellations, the USA will likely continue to lag behind its peers in banning [harmful pesticides](#)."

Donley identified pesticides that are approved for outdoor agricultural use in the USA and compared them to pesticides approved in the EU, China and Brazil. The researcher found that 72, 17 and 11 pesticides are approved for use in the USA which are banned or in the process of being phased out in the EU, Brazil and China, respectively. In addition, Donley identified 85, 13 and two pesticides as being approved in the USA but banned or in the process of being phased out in at least one of the three, two of the three, or all three other agricultural nations, respectively.

Of the 1.2 billion pounds of pesticides used in US agriculture in 2016, approximately 322 million pounds were pesticides banned in the EU, 40 million pounds were pesticides banned in China and nearly 26 million pounds were pesticides banned in Brazil. More than ten percent of total pesticide use in the USA was from pesticide ingredients either banned, not approved or of unknown status in all three of the other nations.

Donley found that of 508 pesticide active ingredients that have been used in agriculture in the USA since 1970, 134 have been cancelled. Out of those, 97 have been voluntarily cancelled by pesticide registrants or were not renewed after their approval period ended. In 37 cases, the US Environmental Protection Agency took unilateral action to prohibit a pesticide from entering the market or cancel its approval.

The number of non-voluntary cancellations of pesticides in the USA

initiated by the EPA (to withdraw approval for their use) has decreased substantially in recent years, whereas voluntary cancellations have greatly increased. They currently account for nearly all agricultural pesticide cancellations in the USA, according to Donley's research.

Donley said: "These findings suggest that the USA utilizes voluntary, industry-initiated [cancellation](#) as the primary method of prohibiting pesticides, which is different from the non-voluntary, regulator-initiated cancellations / bans that are predominant in the EU, Brazil and China."

He added: "Voluntary cancellations ultimately create bias towards pesticides that are easier to cancel because their use has dropped so much that they have become less economically viable to pesticides makers. They can also lead to a significantly longer phase-out period than the typical one year period for most non-voluntarily cancelled pesticides."

The author cautions that he did not seek to compare the effectiveness or robustness of pesticide regulations as a whole between nations and thus the conclusions may not be generalizable to other aspects of pesticide regulation, such as safeguards that do not involve the total banning of a [pesticides](#).

More information: Nathan Donley, The USA lags behind other agricultural nations in banning harmful pesticides, *Environmental Health* (2019). [DOI: 10.1186/s12940-019-0488-0](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12940-019-0488-0)

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