

Addressing the Conflict of Interest and Incompatibility of FAO's Partnership with CropLife International

Briefing to FAO Member States – June 2022

Member States of the FAO have the opportunity to protect farmers and food producers worldwide by urging the Director-General to rescind the FAO's partnership with CropLife International.

CropLife International and toxic pesticides

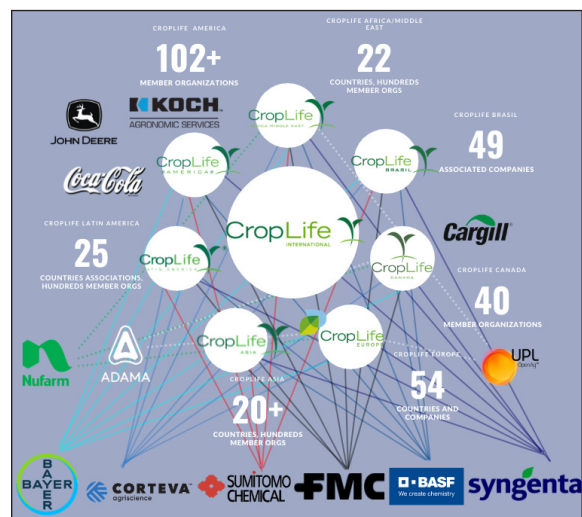
The FAO signed a Letter of Intent with CropLife International in October 2020.¹ CropLife International (CLI) announced this as a “strategic partnership agreement.”²

CLI is a global trade association whose members are the world's largest agri-chemical, pesticide and seed companies:

- BASF
- Bayer Crop Science
- Corteva Agriscience
- FMC and
- Syngenta.

CropLife member companies make over one-third (35%) of their sales from Highly Hazardous Pesticides (HHPs)³—the pesticides that pose the highest levels of risk to health and the environment and are behind some of the most egregious poisoning cases and environmental destruction.

The use of toxic pesticides is a global threat to human health and the environment.⁴ Pesticides are a major driving factor in the unprecedented collapse of insect populations and biodiversity loss.^{5,6} **Each year, 385 million farmers and farmworkers suffer from acute pesticide poisoning — that's 44% of the global population working on farms.**⁷



CropLife International represents these six member corporations and an elaborate global network of regional and national associations spanning 91 countries.

An incompatible partnership for FAO or a Human Rights Framework

The agreement with CropLife threatens FAO's integrity, credibility, impartiality, independence and neutrality. Aligning with the pesticide industry can lead to FAO's reputational risk and threaten FAO's ability to fulfill its mandate to reduce hunger and support farmers and rural communities.

Reliance on hazardous pesticides undermines the rights for present and future generations. A partnership with CropLife is incompatible with FAO's

Pesticide Poisoning is a Global Health and Environment Issue

In 2018, the five main members of CropLife made nearly a quarter of their sales income (22%) from pesticides associated with long-term health effects.¹ They also generated 4% of their sales income with pesticides that are highly acutely toxic.² According to 1990 estimates, such substances cause 25 million severe farmer poisonings every year, resulting in 220,000 deaths, mainly in developing countries.³

10 years of community monitoring by PAN UK show that poisonings are widespread and prevalent around the globe, affecting from 40–80% of farmers and workers in the countries surveyed.⁴

A PANAP 2018 seven-country study on the impact of HHPs on people's health and the environment showed that in Asia, seven out of 10 farmers suffer from acute pesticide poisoning. Most of the HHPs in this study were produced by CropLife member companies.⁵

In addition to acute pesticide poisoning, there are long-term chronic effects of pesticide exposure, including cancers, birth defects, reproductive harm, immunotoxicity, neurological and developmental disorders, and hormone system disruption.



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obligations to uphold human rights. Hazardous pesticides are inconsistent with the rights protected by the United Nations, including:

- **Rights to health and to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment;**
- **Right to safe working conditions;**
- **Right to adequate food;**
- **Rights to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation;**
- **Right to a dignified life; and**
- **Rights of Indigenous Peoples, women, children, workers, and peasants and other people working in rural areas, which includes the right to not use or be exposed to hazardous pesticides.**

In his report to the 49th Session of the UN Human Rights Council in March 2022, UN Special Rapporteur Michael Fakhri states:

Institutionalized agreements between organizations, such as CropLife International, representing and lobbying for the pesticide producers, and United Nations agencies may raise questions of conflict of interest and result in undue corporate influence over international policymaking.

UNSR Fakhri's recommendation strongly encourages the FAO Council "to review the agreement with CropLife International with an eye to human rights concerns" and "to consider directing the Director-General of FAO to rescind the agreement."⁸

Former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Hilal Elver, also expressed grave concerns regarding the pesticide industry's practice of obstructing global and national policy and scientific processes, thoroughly detailed in her 2017 report:⁹

The pesticide industry is dominated by a few transnational corporations that wield extraordinary power over global

agrochemical research, legislative initiatives and regulatory agendas.... The pesticide industry's efforts to influence policy-makers and regulators have obstructed reforms and paralysed global pesticide restrictions globally.

Lack of transparency on due diligence and risk assessment

The LOI was entered prior to the FAO's adoption of its new Strategy for Engagement with the Private Sector and its due diligence framework (FRAME). The FAO's continued lack of transparency regarding the CropLife partnership raises critical questions: was this partnership ever evaluated through a due diligence screening and was a proper risk assessment conducted? If so, by whom, with what result? What risks were identified and what plans were enacted to mitigate these risks? What procedures are currently in place to evaluate the impacts of this collaboration on rights holders? Furthermore, it remains unclear whether or not CropLife was checked against the Exclusionary Criteria or ESG risk elements, evaluation of corporate high-risk sectors, or the other criteria for private sector partnerships embodied in the FRAME.

CropLife's record of influence on policy and scientific data

CropLife member companies have exerted enormous pressure on governments that take policy measures to protect people and environment from pesticide harms.

As profit-driven corporations, CropLife International's primary aim is to maximize sales of their members' products, especially in the Global South. CLI member companies explicitly target countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia, where the proportion of their HHP sales is even higher.¹⁰

Undermining FAO's Code of Conduct on Pesticide Management and its commitments to reducing reliance on pesticides

Collaborating with CropLife on "reducing pesticide risks through sound management and crop production intensification",¹¹ goes directly against the FAO and WHO's International Code of Conduct on Pesticide Management.¹² The Code's implementation document, Guidance on Pest and Pesticide Management Policy Development, goes beyond only reducing risks: It puts **reducing reliance on pesticides as the first, and thus most critical, step towards pesticide risk reduction.**¹³ The reduction in use and dependency on agrochemicals is underscored as a priority for concerted action in other UN fora, and conventions.^{14 15}

The FAO deepening its collaboration with CropLife directly counters any efforts toward progressively banning HHPs, as recommended for consideration by the FAO Council as early as 2006.¹⁶ The FAO and WHO Code's Guidelines on HHPs recommends phasing out and ending the use of HHPs through banning, canceling or withdrawing registration, and "ending use" as a mitigation option.¹⁷

The "sound management of chemicals" perpetuates a dangerously ineffective paradigm of "responsible use." We have not seen a downward trend in pesticide poisoning from "sound management" provided by pesticide companies. Rather than centering the false solution of "sound management," the FAO should follow its own Code Guidelines to prevent, reduce and minimize risk of pesticide exposure, "through

CropLife member companies' influence on national policy and science:

- Bayer played a key role in Thailand's decision to overturn its ban on the cancer-causing glyphosate. Communications between U.S. government officials and Thailand were largely scripted and pushed by Bayer, which lobbied support from USDA, warning of trade impacts to U.S. commodity exports.¹
- Syngenta consistently refused to modify its deadly weedkiller formula of paraquat, claiming it was safe. It manipulated scientific data to circumvent a ban and keep paraquat on the market for 40 years. As a result, hundreds of people, especially in rural communities in the Global South, continue to use it and die from paraquat poisoning.²
- Bayer exerted enormous pressure against Mexico upon the Presidential decree to phase out glyphosate and GMOs. CropLife lobbied the USTR and U.S. EPA which then took up industry's concerns against Mexico to pressure them to drop the ban.³

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Agroecology: In recent years, the FAO has committed to supporting innovative, knowledge-intensive agroecological approaches to address climate change and support farmer livelihoods.* CropLife asserts it provides “environmentally friendly” technology through genetically modified (GM) seeds produced by its member corporations. GM seeds are often engineered to be used with proprietary chemical herbicides — thus a mechanism to boost agrochemical sales. This can bury farmers in debt and threatens the urgently needed transition to agroecology.

* FAO. *Agroecology Knowledge Hub*. <https://www.fao.org/agroecology/overview/our-work/en/>



Yaqui children talking to a watermelon plant, thanking it and helping it grow in Tucson, Arizona. IITC photo by Andrea Carmen

Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples Have Been Vocal in Opposing This “Toxic Alliance”

In November 2020, 352 civil society and Indigenous Peoples’ organizations from 63 countries, representing hundreds of thousands of farmers, fisherfolk, agricultural workers and other communities, sent a letter to Director General Dongyu Qu expressing concerns as rights holders and urging the FAO to abandon its plans to partner with the pesticide industry.¹

More than 250 scientists, academics and researchers sent a letter that same day,² soon followed by 47 foundations and funder networks.³ Director General Qu wrote back to civil society and Indigenous Peoples’ organizations as well as scientists and academics, however the major concerns outlined were not addressed. Representatives of 11 global civil society and Indigenous Peoples’ organizations have formally requested to meet with the Director General⁴ without due response. This past December, over 187,300 individuals from more than 107 countries submitted a global petition⁵ urging an immediate end to the FAO’s partnership with CropLife.

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non-chemical pest management techniques.” As outlined in the Code, “Pest management strategies should include such IPM approaches and not solely rely on chemical control” which can be achieved through agroecological knowledge and practices.¹⁸ This is also underscored by the UN Environmental Program which calls to include “prevention, reduction, remediation, minimization, and elimination of risks during the life cycle.”¹⁹ Further, UNEP has proposed that legally binding instruments may be necessary to strengthen international support for the management of HHPs, especially for developing and transition countries.²⁰

Recognizing CLI’s vested interest in maintaining, if not increasing, its profits from the continued sale of HHPs, how can we expect CLI to support efforts to reduce farmers’ reliance on its products? This is counter to their business, yet it is, according to FAO’s guidance, the first and most important step in preventing and reducing risk.

Undercuts FAO from leading global efforts to support just & resilient food systems through agroecology

FAO’s partnership with CropLife undercuts the FAO and several Member States’ support for agroecology,²¹ an approach that offers viable and sustainable proposals for generating ecologically based food and farming systems without the use of toxic pesticides.

If the FAO is to help Member States successfully scale up agroecology initiatives globally²² to support small-scale food producers and agricultural workers as a response to the challenges of climate change and the need for a transition to a resilient food system, it must lead the way in pursuing decisive action to phase out HHPs globally. **This would be difficult to achieve with the FAO also pursuing active collaborations with the world’s largest pesticide companies.**

What FAO Member States can do

- ➔ **Member States of the FAO must take seriously the major concerns of civil society, farmers, agricultural workers, Indigenous Peoples and other communities regarding the FAO’s partnership with CropLife.**
- ➔ **Member States of the FAO must not allow the agency to partner through a Letter of Intent or any other engagement mechanism with the pesticide industry — nor allow it to hold sway over the agency.** Partnering with CropLife International undermines the FAO’s priority of reducing reliance on pesticides and its commitment to agroecology. It formally ties the FAO to producers of deadly, harmful, unsustainable chemical pesticides.
- ➔ **The FAO must prioritize the increase of farmer access to agroecological practices and tools that help them grow their crops sustainably without harming their health. To safeguard the health and well-being of the people and the planet, Member States should direct the FAO to end its partnership with CropLife International.**

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Submitted by: Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA) • Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL) • FIAN International • Friends of the Earth International • Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) • International Indian Treaty Council (IITC) • International Pollutants Elimination Network (IPEN) • International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUFA) • Pesticide Action Network International • Public Eye • Third World Network



Pesticide Action Network International

PAN International is a network of over 600 participating nongovernmental organizations, institutions and individuals in over 90 countries working to replace the use of hazardous pesticides with ecologically sound and socially just alternatives. www.pan-international.org

Contact:
PAN North America
Email: info@panna.org
Phone: +1 510.788.9020