



# Code of Conduct on the Distribution and Use of Pesticides

**WORKING FOR** farmers, consumers, food traders and policy makers

**WORKING TO** improve food safety and protect human health and the environment

**WORKING WITH** Governments, the private sector, civil society

**WORKING THANKS TO** EU, GEF, Japan, US, Turkey, Netherlands funding

# PESTICIDES CODE OF CONDUCT

In West Africa, nine Sahelian countries have a regional pesticide registration programme under which they share knowledge and resources to ensure their pesticides are tested properly and that older, more hazardous products are taken off the market. In Southeast Asia, tens of thousands of farmers have learned to control plant pests and diseases without resorting to chemicals at all, by learning how to manage natural predators of the pests in their fields. In Bolivia and Paraguay, stocks of old highly toxic pesticides have been removed from the environment, making living and growing conditions much safer. Three different parts of the world but they have a connection – the International Code of Conduct on the Distribution and Use of Pesticides, a document endorsed by all 192 FAO Member Countries that has made global agriculture safer since it was adopted by FAO in 1985 and now will be expanding its impact to the areas of human health and the environment.

## Code to manage pesticides protects human health and food safety

Each growing season in most parts of the world, application of pesticides is considered a critical step in improving agricultural production. Farmers go into their fields to apply their insecticides, fungicides, herbicides and a host of other chemicals specifically blended to kill pests and diseases that attack their crops. It's a big business. The global market in pesticides is said to be worth over USD 30 billion a year and expanding.

The problem is, even though farmers have consistently been advised to use pesticides, many haven't had access to the kind of information or training they need to determine which chemicals to use or

how to use them judiciously or even how to dispose of the empty containers and waste after they have sprayed their fields. FAO and WHO estimate that over 4 million people are likely to be poisoned each year from exposure to toxic pesticides, mainly because they do not have proper training in how to use them safely.

FAO was the first international organization to recognize the magnitude of the problem, and has consistently worked to raise awareness and support policy aimed at ensuring more judicious use of agricultural chemicals. When FAO adopted the world's first Code of Conduct on the Distribution and Use



# PESTICIDES

## CODE OF CONDUCT



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of Pesticides in 1985, it was a landmark. A voluntary instrument, it has been revised twice – in 1989 and 2002 to meet changing needs in the agriculture sector. Its overarching role is to provide guidance to governments in setting standards that cover the food safety, human health and environmental protection aspects of pesticide use – such as setting limits for what pesticide residues can remain in food and ensuring that authorities are aware of pesticide specifications so they know they will be effective, safe and operate in a predictable way in the environment.

Since it was launched, FAO has developed more than 40 sets of guidelines that address different elements of the Code such as how pesticides are registered or what kind of pesticide application equipment is safest to use. All FAO Member Nations have signed on to it, as well as the agro-chemical industry and NGOs.

Thanks to the Code, every country in the world now has some form of regulation system for pesticides, and has a system in place for selecting and registering pesticides that can be marketed. In addition, several of the world's most dangerous toxic chemicals are either out of use or more closely controlled due to international agreements that have spun out of the Code, such as the Rotterdam Convention on the prior informed consent procedure for certain hazardous chemicals and pesticides in international trade.

All of this adds up to what is known as “pesticide lifecycle management”, which means that the Code and its associated guidelines and international agreements call for pesticide management from the moment it leaves the factory and enters the country as a product. This includes managing how it is stored, when and how it is applied by farmers, and also how decisions are made about dealing with the empty container and waste. Making this work is a collaborative effort



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that involves governments, pesticide producers and distributors, farmers and civil society all of whom actively support the Code.

Finding ways to deal with obsolete pesticides and pesticide waste has been a particular problem in the developing world, because of the expense involved in proper disposal. It is estimated that around 200 000 tonnes of obsolete pesticides, nearly half of the world's stockpiles, can be found in just 12 ex-Soviet Union republics in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, where they pose a threat to the health of the people around them and to the environment, including in neighbouring countries. Thus, in April 2012, FAO and the EU launched a programme to provide technical and policy support to help these countries reduce the risks and, at the same time, build capacity to avoid build-up of additional stockpiles in the future.

Although the focus of the Code of Conduct is on agricultural chemicals, its impact is much broader in terms of its beneficiaries. It helps farmers by giving them better access to tools to control pests, consumers benefit because the Code helps control the chemicals that end up in their food, the agrochemical industry benefits because it has a clear regulation to guide it in how chemicals should be provided, and policy-makers and regulators are guided by having access to best practices the Code gathers. And, because it is a voluntary instrument, the Code is able to adapt its focus to meet changing needs. Looking ahead, the Code is once again under revision, this time working with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) to expand its scope to focus on human health and the environment as well as agriculture.



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