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Wheat farms are a major user of glyphosate to desiccate (dry) the crop before harvest.

NEWS

Glyphosate use rises in UK farming while overall pesticide use falls

New data shows glyphosate use has risen by 16 per cent with less ploughing encouraged by regenerative farming playing a 'small role' alongside desiccation of wheat.

14th June 2023 • Nina Pullman • 11 Comments

- Pesticides
- Biodiversity
- Regenerative farming
- Health

The use of glyphosate in UK farming grew by 16 per cent over four years despite being linked to causing cancer and government plans to reduce reliance on conventional chemicals.

New usage figures, [collected for the government by research agency Fera](#) and analysed by the Pesticide Action Network (PAN UK), found that the amount of glyphosate use in UK farming grew by 360 tonnes (16 per



Glyphosate is a widespread herbicide used by farmers to control weeds and as an alternative to ploughing, which disturbs the life beneath the soil and releases carbon. The usage data coincides with a rise in regenerative farming in the UK, where one of the main practices to protect soil is to reduce ploughing, alongside planting increased biodiversity and using livestock for regular fertiliser.

Josie Cohen, head of policy and campaigns at the Pesticide Action Network UK (PAN UK), which spent six months analysing the data, said: "Farmers moving towards no-till/regenerative farming may be playing a small role in the increase in glyphosate usage but there is no way it could account for it on its own.

"In order to reduce the amount of glyphosate used in UK farming, a far better focus would be ending the highly-polluting and unnecessary practice of pre-harvest desiccation in which glyphosate is used to artificially dry a crop."

Glyphosate has been the subject of a number US court cases which have resulted in its manufacturer paying out billions of dollars in compensation to cancer-sufferers. It has also been found to cause harm to bees and other wildlife and regularly contaminates water.

"Despite the ongoing controversy surrounding glyphosate and its impact on human health and the environment, use between 2016 and 2020 has generally increased in terms of weight, area treated and application rate per hectare," a PAN UK briefing document stated.

"The exact reasons for these increases are unclear but could include a rise in pre-harvest desiccation (where crops are artificially dried using glyphosate) and/or an increase in 'no-till' agriculture which tends to rely on glyphosate and other herbicides to deal with weeds without releasing carbon from the soil via ploughing.

Nick Mole from PAN UK, said: "These latest figures, while shocking, are actually a huge underestimation of exposure to glyphosate since they only relate to farming. Meanwhile, glyphosate is also sprayed liberally in most UK towns and cities."

The overall amount of pesticides used by farmers and the area of land treated fell by roughly a quarter between 2016 and 2020, according to the figures, while certain chemicals did see increases.

Between 2016 and 2020, the volume of herbicide 2,4-D increased by 117 per cent. 2,4-D is a possible carcinogen and suspected endocrine disruptor, which means it can interfere with hormone systems.

Fungicide imazalil increased by 53 per cent, while the land area treated with the chemical rose 63 per cent to more than 81,000 hectares. Imazalil has links to cancer and is classified as a 'developmental or reproductive toxin'.

The use of acetamiprid – a neonicotinoid that has not been banned – has grown significantly, with both the volume applied and land area treated rising by more than 240 per cent between 2016 and 2020.

While the amount of pesticides has fallen, the rate at which pesticides are being applied – the average kilogram of pesticide used per hectare of land – has largely remained the same.

Mole explained: "While it is heartening to see overall pesticide use falling, a closer look at the figures reveals that intensity has stayed fairly static.

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11 Comments

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BrianInBrum June 15, 2023 at 4:20 pm

“Glyphosate is a widespread herbicide used by farmers to control weeds and as an alternative to ploughing, which disturbs the life beneath the soil and releases carbon.”

I saw videos by Jake Freestone regarding his use of Glyphosate. It seems there is an argument that the benefits outweigh the risk. For the vast majority of people their exposure to this chemical will be nil so perhaps we shouldn't worry too much about it.

Log in to Reply  1 likes

Robert John June 18, 2023 at 6:54 pm

I'm not convinced that the only factor to be taken into account for the use of poison (for that is what it is) on land is the effect solely on humans. And if the 'vast majority' will have a 'nil' exposure, what on earth are they growing in these fields?

(I do get the feeling that not a lot of what we actually eat is grown in UK fields).

But, as I understand for e.g. Dave Goulson, much of this stuff ends up in run-off and into our rivers. Where precisely where we don't want it to go.

 10 likes

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Fergus Maclaren Webster June 19, 2023 at 7:21 am

I think the environmental harms far outweigh the more direct ones to the human organism, but of course they rebound on us too, in the form of soil depletion and degradation, biodiversity loss as GMOs supplant heirloom species, etc. Beware the profiteering “green revolution”, glyphosate will be viewed like antibiotics in few years time. It may be helping farmers survive prices fixed by the supermarkets in the short term, but they are the real victims, as we will see if the soil is sterilised further.

 4 likes

Ani June 19, 2023 at 1:31 pm

Jake Freestone proudly states he sells his farm products to Unilever, a corporation with low scores among ethics investigators for their poor treatment of the environment and lab animals. Unilever also lobbies for lower standards in food and household products. So their custom is not exactly a glowing endorsement of Freestone's farming practices.

 4 likes



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Comments Editor June 22, 2023 at 2:29 pm

Unfortunately one study found glyphosate has been found in 80% of urine samples in the US. It has been found to disrupt the endocrine system, mitochondrial function and DNA expression in humans, which is definitely concerning.

5 likes

Ani June 19, 2023 at 12:33 am

Children are exposed to glyphosate from both agricultural and domestic sources. There is growing concern among researchers in the U.S. who have found a link between glyphosate exposure (as detected in urine levels) and early cases of fatty liver disease, metabolic disorder, and diabetes in children and young adults. Adult incidence of stroke, heart disease and cancer also increase with childhood exposure because of an associated increase in inflammatory response.

The impact on wildlife health is just as bleak, as the antibiotic glyphosate weakens animals' metabolic processes and immune systems. Fish exposed to glyphosate runoff swim more slowly. Birds become more prone to bacterial and fungal diseases.

How broadly do we allow ourselves to dismiss the effects of pesticides if scaling them back would mean higher prices? Have we already decided who doesn't matter in this equation? Children? The rural poor? The 4% of earth's biomass that remains of our wildlife?

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Fergus Maclaren Webster June 19, 2023 at 7:25 am

Good to read about the nitty-gritty of thi application of this dreaded herbicide. And to know that Riverside runs a profitable and responsible business without using it. Keep holding the beacon, please.

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743998 June 20, 2023 at 6:01 am

Stephanie Seneff's book Toxic Legacy is worth a read – all about the use of glyphosate. It is actually quite terrifying – the book suggests that we have been slowly poisoning ourselves over the last 50 years because of glyphosate usage. In fairness it is only research in the last 5 years or so that is really beginning to come up with some evidence of its harm to the animal kingdom including ourselves.

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humans/wildlife:

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Ani June 21, 2023 at 12:53 pm

Glyphosate smells (to me anyway) like medicine and sticking plasters. There's another product that gets used a lot that smells strongly like PVC rubber or new plastic.

0 likes

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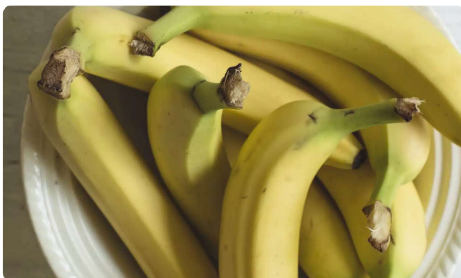
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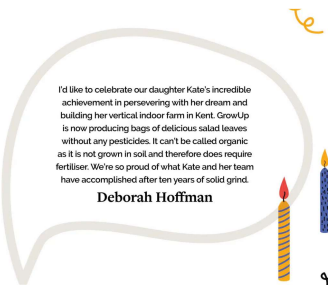
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I'd like to celebrate our daughter Kate's incredible achievement in persevering with her dream and building her vertical indoor farm in Kent. GrowUp is now producing bags of delicious salad leaves without any pesticides. It can't be called organic as it is not grown in soil and therefore does require fertiliser. We're so proud of what Kate and her team have accomplished after ten years of solid grind.

Deborah Hoffman

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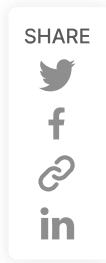
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Riverford grows and sells organic food through its award-winning veg boxes, delivering across the country to a loyal band of customers who share a passion for good food, good farming and good business.

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