



ROTTERDAM CONVENTION

SUCCESS STORY #1

HELPING FARMERS TO PHASE OUT HAZARDOUS PESTICIDES IN SOUTH AMERICA

Farmers and their families are at great risk without the implementation of the Rotterdam Convention

By controlling trade and sharing information, the Rotterdam Convention can contribute to removing, or at the very least drastically limiting, the use of hazardous pesticides in farming. But this does not take place at the expense of growing a decent, healthy crop or at the farmer's livelihood. Our objective is therefore twofold: to prevent use of certain hazardous pesticides, but also to encourage the growth of the healthiest crops.

But we also know we will only succeed if we work closely with farmers. We learn from them as much as, if not more than, they learn from us.

In Latin America, the food that farmers produce for their families is often a matter of sheer survival. Farmers naturally try to protect the crop they cultivate, but all too often they have not had sufficient training in the sound management

of pesticides or in non-chemical or alternative methods to crop production.

Pesticide poisoning is highly incapacitating and prevents farmers from being able to work. Often without any form of social security, a farmer unable to work risks not only his life, but his family's as well. It is quite probable, therefore, that once poisoned and already sick, he will continue to work whilst suffering from nausea, headaches, vomiting and blurred vision.

In other words, farmers have to continue working as best they can. This is obviously destructive enough, but one recurrent and particular problem is that incidents of poisoning take place far away from where victims can easily find hospital treatment. By definition, farmers live and work in highly rural areas which perhaps may only have a nurse close by, but in many places almost never a doctor.

Much of the work of the Rotterdam Convention takes place at the macroscopic, country level. Technical assistance is provided to Parties, including to help them draw up specific and individualised national action plans to control trade in chemicals and combat pesticides. Solutions are never imposed and work is undertaken with each country on a case-by-case basis to produce the most effective and long-lasting results. Without effective regulatory infrastructures, countries always need specific and tailored help with eliminating certain hazardous pesticides, especially as there are regularly between 1,000 and 5,000 incidents of pesticide poisoning across the region each year.

In Latin America, a programme was developed and implemented to collect information on exposure to pesticides and to collect reports of actual pesticide poisoning, including hospitalization. This initial round of support examined the contexts in Colombia, Panama, Guatemala, Honduras and the Dominican Republic. In the first round of the pilot projects, at least 100 farmers in Colombia officially confirmed that they had suffered from pesticide poisoning. The government then had solid research upon which to build and execute risk reduction measures.

But this is by no means the only type of support that the Convention offers. Farmers are provided with farmer field

school training on integrated pest management, so that they can learn that not every bug is a pest and not every brown leaf will immediately cause a yield loss.

In Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic and Colombia, in a programme funded by the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization, work is underway with coffee growing farmers to combat the use of Endosulfan, a highly toxic organophosphate for which there is no antidote. Farmers apply Endosulfan with leaking backpack sprayers, and therefore get exposed to highly dangerous quantities. Virtually anyone would die who is exposed to organophosphates for which no antidote exists and indeed, it is all too tragically often used in suicides.

Working in partnership with NGOs, the projects promoted instead the use of the fungus *Metarhizium* which controls one of the major pests in coffee in Latin America - the coffee berry borer. These insects bore a hole in the ripe berry - which is supposed to be roasted and provide the taste for coffee - but the eggs cause the berry to fall on the ground before it can be harvested. The fungus can be produced regionally by not-for-profit laboratories or the plant action service. This means that farmers do not have to buy the fungus from multinational profit-making companies as it can be produced locally.

