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Spanish study feeds into pesticide controversy^[fr]^[de]

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As the EU's pesticides package moves into the final stages of adoption, new research shows that all Spaniards are affected by at least one type of pesticide, fungicide or insecticide classified internationally as potentially harmful to human health.

Related:

 [Links Dossier: Environment and health strategy \(SCALE\)](#)

Background:


The Commission **proposed** in July 2006 to tighten pesticide usage and authorisation rules in Europe, as concerns over the health and environmental impact of such plant protection products grows.

Whereas environmental and health NGOs welcome the initiative, farmers and pesticide producers have expressed concern that the measures will lead to more red tape and remove harmless substances from the market.


In its first reading on the package, in October 2007, the Parliament voted to expand the scope of substances banned from use in EU pesticides production (see [EurActiv 24/10/07](#)), while EU-27 agriculture ministers, who met in December 2007, are said to have reached a political agreement on the dossier (see [EurActiv 19/12/07](#)).



However, there have been conflicting press reports about the outcome, as the full text of the Council agreement will only be made public in January 2008 when a common position is finalised and sent to the Parliament for a second reading.

Issues:

The Spanish study, carried out by the University of Granada, examined the contamination levels of certain **persistent organic pollutants**  in a sample of the adult population (387 individuals) and tried to find determining factors associated with such levels. People from both urban and semi-rural areas were part of the sample.

According to the results, published in late 2007, 100% of Spaniards carry at least one type of harmful chemical in their bodies. The researchers also detected more of these potentially harmful substances in women than in men and more in adults than younger people. They also found that diet is an important factor in the concentration of these substances.

Higher concentration in women and older people is "possibly due to the great persistence of these substances in the environment, which results in their **biomagnification**  in the food chain and in their bioaccumulation over time," explained Juan Pedro Arrebola Moreno.

The researchers took a sample of each volunteer's fatty tissue via surgery, and asked questions about their place of residence, lifestyle, eating habits and activities throughout their life. The six substances sampled included compounds related to industrial processes, such as **PCBs**  , and **fungicides**  used to prevent spread of fungi in crops as well as insecticides.

The substances, which can enter the body through food, water and air, tend to accumulate in human fatty tissue through which they enter into the organism, with potential significant adverse effects on human health. These include cancers and damage to reproductive or immune systems.

Regarding the importance of diet as a factor in the concentration of these chemicals in the body, the study argues that the "ingestion of some aliments, particularly those of animal origin and high fat content, triggers a greater presence of these toxic substances in the human organism."

Positions:

According to Catherine Ganzlehen from the **European Environmental Bureau (EEB)**, existing laws control the sale and disposal of pesticides but leave their use on agricultural land unregulated. "As a result, 5% of our food contains pesticide residues above regulatory limits and water suppliers cite severe contamination of lowland rivers, with no sign of decrease at either end."



The **European Crop Protection Association (ECPA)**, an industry body, deplores the fact that the impact of pesticides on the availability of fresh food in Europe is not understood by all. It says that major changes in legislation could "result in the loss of tools which farmers need to grow the fresh food which forms the basis of a healthy diet".

Latest & next steps:

- **Jan. 2008**: Council's political agreement on the pesticides package made public.
- **Spring 2008**: Second reading in the Parliament.

Links

European Union

- Council: [DRAFT: Proposal for a Directive establishing a framework for Community action to achieve a sustainable use of pesticides of pesticides](#)   (13 December 2007)
- Commission: [Sustainable Use of Pesticides](#) 

Business & Industry

- European Crop Protection Association (ECPA) [Food Safety and Quality](#) 

- European Crop Protection Association (ECPA) press release: [ECPA urges Agriculture Council to leave farmers the tools they need to protect their crops](#) (19 December 2007)
- [European Seed Association \(ESA\)](#)

NGOs

- Health & Environment Alliance (HEAL): [Pesticides](#)
- [PAN Europe - Pesticides Action Network Europe](#)

Think tanks & Academia

- University of Granada press release: [100% of people carry at least one type of pesticide from the air, water or food in their bodies](#) (29 November 2007)