



Environmental problems caused by glyphosate, and the need to support farmers

Background briefing, #Stopglyphosate European Citizens Initiative

Glyphosate is perhaps one of the most successful products in the history of the pesticides industry, as it proposes a relatively low toxicity to humans (compared to other herbicides) combined with an impressive efficiency in wiping out most weeds. It is indeed one of the most used agri-chemicals ever. The “ultimate killing machine”, as [one advertisement](#) for it goes. And that is why, now that we are experiencing the fastest biodiversity collapse ever recorded, using such a weapon of mass destruction must no longer be authorised.

Glyphosate is indeed more than just a broad-spectrum weed-killer. By eradicating spontaneous flora over vast areas of land, its wide-scale application in industrial agriculture disrupts and annihilates entire ecosystems: with the plants go the insects, the animals, the bacteria and the fungi that live with them. Its repeated application creates resistant weeds that sometimes become unmanageable. Its application also damages the soil, as it is also directly toxic to numerous soil bacteria and fungi. In times of climate change, nurturing soils' health is absolutely key to our capacity to keep producing food, having access to freshwater and maintaining an environment that is not a desert. This starts with no longer poisoning them and killing their cover.

But while it is essential that glyphosate is removed from the market, it is very important to not do it as a stand-alone measure. The substance is cheap, effective, chemical replacements tend to be more toxic and expensive and most farmers are in a tragic situation economically. Farmers are already forced to poison themselves to escape ruin: removing glyphosate without accompanying support measures would leave the most fragile worse off.

As a consequence, the EU must support farmers so that the terms of trade enable them to at last make a decent living out of their work, and move to agronomy practices that do not compromise public health and our capacity to produce food in the future. The upcoming reform of the Common Agriculture Policy provides an excellent opportunity to try to do that.