

**Outline for a public hearing
before the Bundestag Committee
on Economic Cooperation and Development
on 13 November 2024 regarding
the export, use, benefits and side effects of pesticides not authorised in the European
Union**

I. Topic

The Federal Republic of Germany has committed itself to helping achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda at the national and international levels. SDG 2 is to “End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture”. Moreover, the UN Environment Assembly voted in March 2024 in favour of ending the use of the most toxic pesticides (PAN German, 2024).

The food industry and the agricultural sector are facing a dual challenge: to safeguard both food production and environmental sustainability.¹ According to current estimates, there will still be almost 600 million people suffering from hunger in 2030 (UN report “The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World”, 2023). This situation will be further exacerbated by the effects of climate change, as extreme weather events and changing climate conditions destabilise agricultural production.

Agricultural production, including animal husbandry (and production of animal feed), requires the use of land and water, often in combination with pesticides, fertilisers and energy. Across the globe, almost 40% of the planet’s land surface and 70% of water supplies are used for irrigated agricultural activities (OECD/FAO, 2016). The use of fertilisers and pesticides is indispensable for many farms, to increase agricultural productivity and minimise damage to harvests from pests and diseases. Their use is therefore an important factor in global food security.

On the other hand, the active ingredients² of synthetic chemical pesticides are associated with sometimes considerable risks to human health and the environment when improperly used. According to a study by the international Pesticide Action Network (PAN, 2023), estimates suggest around 385 million cases a year of acute unintentional pesticide poisoning around the world, around 11,000 of them fatal.³ Among the worldwide farming population of approximately 860 million people, around 44% a year suffer considerable damage to their health when using synthetic chemical pesticides (Boedeker et al., 2020). Particularly in rural areas of the Global South, where environmental, health and safety regulations are often inadequate, non-existent or even disregarded, people are especially at risk. In Burkina Faso, for example, a shocking 83% of the agricultural workforce are affected by poisoning (Boedeker et al., 2020). Chronic exposure to synthetic chemical pesticides can lead to severe health problems, including cancer, hormonal imbalances and

¹ The EAT-*Lancet* Commission has proposed a “planetary health diet” to adapt global eating habits to planetary boundaries (Willett et al., 2019).

² Active ingredients are the primary active chemicals in a pesticide formulation, which usually contains additional substances such as extenders or solvents (Greenpeace, 2020).

³ In 2020, PAN published a study on acute pesticide poisonings based on the WHO/IFCS definition of such a poisoning as “any illness or health effect resulting from [...] exposure to a pesticide within 48 h”. The classification tool assesses the risk of poisoning according to exposure criteria and symptoms. However, it remains difficult to collate global poisoning statistics because of incomplete databases and a lack of national registers (Boedeker, 2023).

neurological damage. The correct use of protective clothing, training in correct application and informed use of the substance can significantly reduce those risks.

In addition, use of these substances across large areas can lead to soil, air and water pollution and biodiversity decline. Synthetic chemical pesticides are designed to be toxic to target species, such as vermin or weeds – although the incidence of resistance to the pesticides used is on the rise. Over time, this can result in them losing their intended effect.

Particularly in countries very rich in biodiversity, the large-scale cultivation of crops like genetically modified soy can contribute to a sharp increase in the use of synthetic chemical pesticides. The global tonnage of pesticides rose by almost 81% between 1990 and 2017; Asia recorded a 97% rise, while South America even saw an increase of 484% (Heinrich Böll Foundation, 2022). Currently, 70% of the global market for synthetic chemical pesticides is controlled by five leading agrochemical firms from industrialised countries. In 2018, more than a third of the income made by those firms came from the sale of chemicals classed as highly hazardous pesticides,⁴ in the absence of an official FAO list, by the Pesticide Action Network (PAN) (Public Eye, 2020;⁵ Heinrich Böll Foundation, 2022).

In that context, the European Commission published the Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability on 14 October 2020 within the framework of the Green Deal, to enhance the protection of human health and the environment against hazardous chemicals. The strategy uses international cooperation and partnership to encourage the safe handling of hazardous chemicals and aims to prevent the export of chemicals that are banned in the EU, not least by means of amendments to the relevant legislation. The Federal Government has also committed itself, in its coalition agreement, to ambitiously reducing pesticide use and prohibiting the export of certain pesticides not authorised in the EU for reasons of human health (2021-2024 coalition agreement, p. 120). Some pesticides are no longer licensed in the EU in view of the risks and hazards they pose. For many active pesticide ingredients, manufacturers in the EU do not apply for authorisation. One of the reasons for this is that there is no application in the EU for those substances. The pesticides therefore remain unlicensed. Companies in most EU member states – except France and Belgium – are still permitted to sell those pesticides outside Europe, as long as they meet the sometimes more severe licensing criteria in the purchaser's country. As an innovative business location, Germany has a significant role as an exporter: in 2021, some 8,500 tonnes of such active ingredients not authorised in the EU were exported from Germany in finished ("formulated") pesticides, plus 37,500 tonnes in other mixtures or as pure product (Clausing et al., 2022). An export ban on pesticides harmful to human health has been under discussion within the Federal Government since May 2023.

Sustainable agricultural policy needs to find the balance between productivity, public health and environmental concerns. That requires consistent respect for safety requirements, the correct use of protective clothing, analysis of the ways exported synthetic chemical pesticides are used, systematic measures to reduce their use while maintaining

⁴ The PAN category of "highly hazardous pesticides" (HHPs) takes account not only of acute toxicity but also of long-term toxic effects (such as cancer and hormonal imbalances) and environmental impacts. The categories and criteria are based in part on the WHO pesticide classification system, the Globally Harmonised System (GHS), the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), the United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) and the Rotterdam Convention (PIC Convention). By contrast, the WHO classification focuses mainly on acute toxicity to humans, measured by LD₅₀ values, and takes less account of long-term effects and damage to the environment (PAN, 2021; PAN, 2014).

⁵ Analysis by Unearthed/Public Eye of export notifications issued by the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) and the French, German and Belgian authorities in 2018. The analysis is limited to those pesticides which are banned for use as "plant protection products" and are exported for that purpose.

productivity, and the promotion of alternative, environmentally friendly cultivation methods.

II. Objective

The objective of the hearing is to comprehensively evaluate the export, use/application, benefits and side effects of synthetic chemical pesticides not authorised in the European Union and potentially to process recommendations for reducing their use and developing sustainable alternatives.

The state of scientific knowledge will be set out in full, challenges made clear and solutions signposted.

III. Written statements

Each expert is requested to send a written statement to the secretariat of the Committee on Economic Cooperation and Development by 11 November 2024. Fundamental positions and additional important aspects or ideas relating to the topic can also be submitted, but, like any papers not specifically requested, they will not be uploaded to the committee's website. The secretariat will distribute the requested documents to the members of the committee prior to the hearing as a basis for the discussion.

IV. Division of experts by parliamentary group

Each parliamentary group or grouping designates one expert. There will therefore be six participating experts.

The parliamentary groups and groupings designating them are required to submit the experts' CVs before the committee secretariat invites them. The experts must have a current professional connection to the topic and/or demonstrably possess the relevant expertise. The parliamentary groups are requested to find consensus on the designation (suitability in view of the topic) of the experts. If they cannot, the committee must decide on the matter following preparatory consultations among the group coordinators.

V. Structure of the hearing

The hearing is to take place on 13 November 2024. Each expert will have the opportunity to make a verbal opening statement.

The discussion of the topic should not only contextualise the topic scientifically but also pinpoint possible solutions.

Structure/Timings

- Total duration: 90 mins
- Structure
 - o Welcome, explanation of timings and introduction of experts by Acting Chairman: 5 mins
 - o Opening statements by six experts: 6 x 5 mins = 30 mins
 - o Two rounds of questions from all parliamentary groups with direct replies from experts (first round: 6 x 5 mins, second round: 6 x 4 mins) = 54 mins
 - o Vote of thanks and closure of meeting by Acting Chairman: 5 mins
 - o Buffer: 5 mins

VI. Topic and questions

a. **Scientific contextualisation: Examination of the role of pesticides in safeguarding global nutrition and of the health risks and environmental consequences of using synthetic chemical pesticides not authorised in the EU**

1. What role do synthetic chemical pesticides play in agriculture in the Global South today, how has this developed since 2000, and can we foresee how it will have developed by 2030?
2. Under what circumstances or procedures are synthetic chemical pesticides authorised, and how do the various levels of protection in strongly agricultural countries of the Global South, like Brazil, differ from those of the European Union?
3. What are the differences between the synthetic chemical pesticides that are authorised and used in Europe and the substances used in developing countries?
4. What do pesticides contribute to increasing agricultural productivity in developing countries?
5. Can a reduction or a marked reduction in the use of pesticides in developing countries be expected to result in an increase in hunger?
6. Does the use of pesticides in developing countries help reduce the amount of land used for agricultural purposes in developing countries, as the same yields can be gained from smaller areas?
7. What is your assessment of the German chemical industry's efforts to ensure pesticides are used correctly in developing countries in a manner that avoids harmful side effects?
8. Under what circumstances can synthetic chemical pesticides constitute a serious problem for our environment and health?
9. What criteria are suitable for comprehensively and scientifically evaluating the toxicity of synthetic chemical pesticides for humans and the environment?
10. What is your assessment of the criteria developed by the FAO/WHO Panel of Experts on Pesticide Management? Does the International Code of Conduct on Pesticide Management take sufficient account of the risks to humans and the environment?
11. Which active ingredients would be classed as highly hazardous according to the criteria developed by the FAO/WHO Panel of Experts on Pesticide Management?
12. What acute and long-term health risks are associated with the use of synthetic chemical pesticides? How does consideration of safety regulations fit in here?
13. How does the incidence of pesticide poisoning in industrialised countries differ from that of developing countries, and what might explain the difference?
14. What particular synthetic chemical active ingredients are suspected of causing severe impacts on health, such as cancer or neurological problems? What scientific evidence is there regarding those health impacts?
15. What legal requirements exist in the EU or in developing countries to minimise harmful substances – made of synthetic chemical active ingredients – and the risks they have been proven to pose to producers, users, etc.?
16. Which sections of the population are particularly at risk, and how can that risk be minimised?
17. What harm does the use of synthetic chemical pesticides cause to the environment, and how can that harm be minimised?
18. What long-term consequences does using synthetic chemical pesticides have on soil fertility and soil health?
19. To what extent do synthetic chemical pesticides contribute to the pollution of water sources, and what consequences does this have for drinking water supplies and marine ecosystems?
20. What effects do synthetic chemical pesticides have on biodiversity, particularly on pollinators such as bees and other insects?

21. On what scale can yields be expected to increase as a result of AI-supported analysis of soils, weather, etc. in combination with precision use of synthetic chemical pesticides? Might the use of modern technologies such as AI in future change the quantities of synthetic chemical pesticides required?
22. What influence might spreading fertiliser using manned and unmanned precision aerial equipment have on the quantities of synthetic chemical pesticides required and on yields?
23. What mechanisms lead to the spread of synthetic chemical pesticides beyond the areas originally treated when they are sprayed using manned and/or unmanned aircraft? How can that spread be controlled?
24. How widespread are residues of synthetic chemical pesticides in foodstuffs, and what is being done to monitor compliance with agreed limits?

b. Solutions: Current and future regulation of production and export of synthetic chemical pesticides not authorised in the EU and possible sustainable alternatives to using synthetic chemical pesticides

1. Do you think an export ban on pesticides prohibited or not authorised in the EU would be sensible? Would it be more desirable to establish varying degrees of prohibition / differentiated solutions or a blanket ban?
2. What legislative and regulatory measures would be required to implement an export ban on pesticides prohibited in the EU? What statutory measures are necessary with regard to the export of basic substances (active ingredients)?
3. What is the effect of voluntary commitments by major German and European exporters on pesticide manufacturing within Europe and on pesticide exports?
4. What sustainable cultivation methods can reduce the use of synthetic chemical pesticides while safeguarding agricultural productivity and yields to guarantee diversified production in the interests of food security? What effects would these changes have on agricultural consumption of land and water?
5. What is your assessment of the Federal Government's current development policy efforts to encourage sustainable or agri-environmental cultivation methods in countries of the Global South?
6. What successful examples and practices exist around the world in terms of farming using no or small quantities of synthetic chemical pesticides, and how can they be scaled up?
7. How can agro-ecology and integrated pest management (IPM) be implemented effectively on farms?
8. What progress has there been on the development of organic pesticides to replace synthetic chemical pesticides, and what are the greatest challenges involved in introducing them?
9. How effective are organic pesticides in comparison to synthetic chemical pesticides, and is 1:1 replacement feasible?
10. Can genetically enhanced plants reduce the quantities of synthetic chemical pesticides required without affecting yields?
11. What international collaborations are required to regulate the global use of synthetic chemical pesticides? What is the role of national legislative and licensing procedures in that context?
12. What might sustainable and environmentally friendly agricultural policy look like, and what is the relationship between environmental/biodiversity conservation and yield?

13. How can Germany and the EU contribute to stronger protections and higher safety standards for the use of synthetic chemical pesticides in developing countries? What role do levels of protection in the users' countries play in that context?

VII. Organisational points

- The session will be broadcast publicly.
- Interpreters will be arranged depending on the experts' language requirements.
- Experts will be able to attend remotely via video link.