

AFTER COP 15:

To Preserve Biodiversity, we must abandon our Dependence on Pesticides

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On May 15, Mr. Guilbeault, Canada's Minister of Environment and Climate Change, launched consultations on the development of Canada's ¹ 2030 Biodiversity Strategy to follow up on promises made at the COP 15 held in Montreal last December. In order to put a stop to and remedy the loss of biodiversity, target 7 – much less ambitious than initially planned – aims to reduce the global risk linked to pesticides by 50% by 2030.

Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* already denounced the misuse of pesticides and their impacts on biodiversity. It is appalling to see that Canada has never had and still does not have a plan to reduce the use of pesticides. Despite rhetoric advocating the reduction of pesticides, their use has increased exponentially over the past 30 years, particularly in the agricultural sector. Glyphosate-based herbicides (GBH) are the most widely used pesticides on the planet as well as in Canada, with a total of nearly 470 million kilograms being sold in Canada between 2007 and 2018 ². GBHs accounted for 58% of pesticides used in the agricultural sector in Canada in 2017, particularly for genetically modified (GM) crops and legumes, but also in forestry. Overall, sales of agricultural herbicides in Canada have increased by 234% between 1994 and 2020 ³, including those based on glyphosate whose sales have increased by 51% between 2007 and 2017 alone.

Impacts on the health of ecosystems and populations

For many years, experts have been pointing out the serious threats to biodiversity and our entry into the sixth mass extinction. Pesticides have been identified as one of the causes of the rapid and catastrophic collapse in the number of animal and plant species. In study after study, the decline of birds, pollinators and insects is associated with the massive use of pesticides that are found north of the Arctic to the bottom of the Amazon rainforest. In Canada, the boreal forest, a place of great biodiversity, is sprayed with GBH, despite the repeated requests to stop by many indigenous communities, knowing that this

¹Minister Guilbeault launches consultations on the development of Canada's 2030 Biodiversity Strategy, May 15, 2023 ([link](#))

² Bacon, M.-H.; Vandelac, L.; Gagnon, M.-A.; Parent, L. [Poisoning Regulation, Research, Health, and the Environment: The Glyphosate-Based Herbicides Case in Canada](#) . *Toxics* **2023** ,11(2), 121; <https://doi.org/10.3390/toxics11020121>

Poisoning Regulation, Research, Health, and the Environment: The Glyphosate-Based Herbicides Case in Canada, *Toxics*, January 2023, Marie-Hélène Bacon and co. ([link](#))

³Genetically Modified Crops and Herbicides, CBAN Briefing, March 2023 ([link](#))

practice is not necessary - as demonstrated by the example of Quebec, which has forbidden forestry spraying since 2001.

National and international objectives for the preservation of biodiversity can only be achieved if the use of pesticides is considerably reduced. We believe that Canada must adopt a biodiversity strategy that includes clear and strong objectives on the pesticide file.

Moreover, while the deleterious effects of pesticides for exposed people are very well documented in the independent scientific literature⁴, a major reduction in the use of pesticides would both protect biodiversity and the health of populations, thus killing two birds with one stone for the government, which has a duty to protect human health.

Evaluations and Uses of Concern

There is an urgent need to put in place a credible reduction plan to meet our commitments to reduce the impacts of pesticides by 50% by 2030.

This must also be accompanied by a profound reform of the evaluation of pesticides carried out by Health Canada. This new evaluation will have to take into consideration the impacts of the commercial formulations used and not only the ingredients declared "active" by the agrochemical companies. This evaluation must be based on the most recent independent scientific studies reviewed by peers, and not mainly on confidential "closed-science" studies carried out by the firms themselves.

This strategy must put forward a national reduction target for pesticide sales of at least 50%, as set by the European Union in 2020. To this end, it is important that all orientations of Canadian agricultural policies not only take these targets into consideration but that they support and finance agricultural alternatives integrating significant biodiversity such as agroecology to allow farmers to get out of this model of industrial crops based on chemical inputs. There is also a need to increase public support for independent research in agriculture, which builds on resilient and self-sustaining agro-ecosystems and which does not rely on the increased use of inputs, but rather on knowledge and ecological services.

Achieving these objectives cannot be done without resolving the major problem of scientific and regulatory capture by the agrochemical industry of the Canadian agencies responsible for the evaluation and regulatory framework of pesticides. As long as it exists, the Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) "will favor commercial interests over the imperatives of public health and environmental protection" ⁵. This regulatory capture was recently illustrated in the file of new GMOs with the about - face of the Minister of Agriculture, M-C Bibeau, on the voluntary transparency finally granted to

⁴INSERM, 2021, www.inserm.fr/expertise-collective/pesticides-et-sante-nouvelles-donnees-2021/

⁵Bacon, Marie-Hélène, Louise Vandelac, Marc-André Gagnon, and Lise Parent. 2023. "Poisoning Regulation, Research, Health, and the Environment: The Glyphosate-Based Herbicides Case in Canada" *Toxics* 11, no. 2:121. <https://doi.org/10.3390/toxics11020121>

agrochemical companies, or even on that of the maximum residue limits (MRL) of GBH that Health Canada proposed to increase at the request of pesticide sellers.

We therefore call on Mr. Guilbeault for a *2030 Biodiversity Strategy* that respects the demands repeatedly expressed by independent scientists, citizens and Indigenous communities across Canada. We collectively hope and expect that the decisions resulting from this biodiversity strategy will be – finally - consistent with the stated intentions and commitments made by the Canadian government before the 20,000 delegates from more than 190 countries and Member States at COP 15 .

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