

FROM THE GROUND UP

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Pesticides: A Danger to Farmworkers and the Environment

Pesticide Statistics

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- Number of pesticides presently on the market that were registered before being tested to determine if they caused cancer, birth defects or wildlife toxicity: **400**
- Amount of time it takes to ban a pesticide in the U.S. using present procedures: **10 years**
- Percentage of the total U.S. population supplied with drinking water from groundwater: **50%**
- Percentage of all U.S. counties containing groundwater susceptible to contamination from agricultural pesticides and fertilizers: **46%**
- Number of people in the U.S. routinely drinking water contaminated with carcinogenic herbicides: **14 million**
- Percentage of municipal water treatment facilities lacking equipment to remove these chemicals from the drinking water: **90%**
- Occupational group that suffers the highest rate of chemical-related illness in the U.S.: **farmworkers**
- Pesticide-related illnesses among farmworkers in the U.S. each year: **approximately 300,000**
- Number of people in the U.S. who die each year from cancer related to pesticides: **10,400**

Source:

Pesticides from the Air: Dangers to Farmworker Families

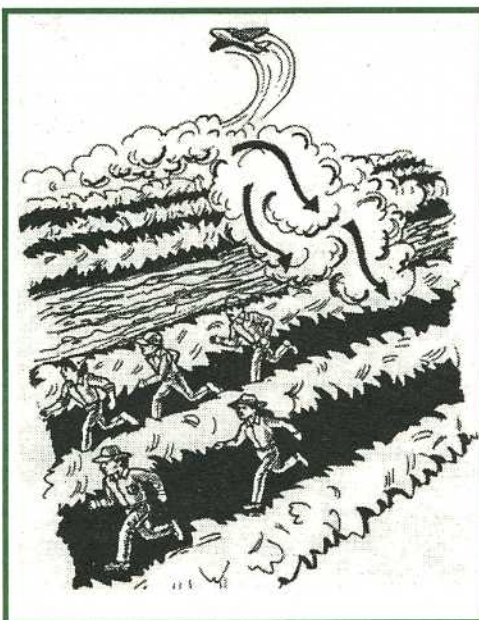
by Fawn Pattison, Executive Director, Agricultural Resources Center
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Most farmworkers live quite close to the fields where they work, often staying in homes or camps on the farm property where they are working. It has been widely documented that farmworker families are exposed to dangerous pesticides in the home because pesticides can be brought in on work clothes and shoes, and even on skin and hair. Children can also be exposed when they play in or near the fields where parents are working, as well as through contaminated drinking water.

Farmworker families also suffer exposure from pesticide drift. Drift happens when clouds of pesticides sprayed onto the fields move from their intended target onto neighboring homes, crops, roads, businesses, churches, and schools. Toxic pesticides can and do drift right onto the homes and surrounding yards where food is prepared, laundry is hung to dry, and where children play.

One of the most serious causes of pesticide drift is aerial spraying. Many of us have seen the vapor trails as airplanes or helicopters spray farm crops like cotton, wheat, corn or rice with pesticides. Because aerial spraying uses such large quantities of pesticides, and often from a great height, drift is a serious side effect. It has been estimated that less than 0.1% of pesticides ever reach the pest they were intended for.¹ More than 40% of the pesticide sprayed aerially will migrate off-site as drift.²

Here in North Carolina, aerial spraying is used extensively on cotton, tobacco, pine plantations (for paper), and along utility rights-of-way to keep vegetation off power lines in mountainous areas. That means farmworkers and others who live near these crops are at risk every time pesticides are applied. *Continued on page 2*



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*"Run From Drift" image from the EPA
Farmworker Safety Manual*

