

# PESTICIDE EXPOSURE

## HARVEST OF JUSTICE 2022: CHILD LABOR IN AGRICULTURE



Photo Credit: Human Rights Watch

According to experts, children are three times more vulnerable to pesticides than adults. Children's smaller body size and still developing organs make them more susceptible to pesticide toxicity. Plus, being exposed to pesticides for a long-time puts children at risk of acute pesticide poisoning. Child labor laws forbid youth under 16 from handling certain classes and types of chemicals or pesticides, with some state laws being even more strict on age. However, even if youth are not handling the actual pesticides, they are still being exposed when planting, weeding, thinning, irrigating, pruning, harvesting, and processing crops that have been sprayed.

A Wake Forest School of Medicine survey of child farm workers in North Carolina found that only 8% of participants received any pesticide training even though it is required

that all farm workers receive training within a week of beginning work. A slight majority of participants wore gloves, but they followed few other protective measures against pesticide exposure. The survey found that most participants took risks that unknowingly furthered their possible exposure. For example, the majority of participants worked in wet shoes and/or wet clothes. Forty percent worked in a short or sleeveless shirt, while a small number worked in shorts and others worked barefoot or in sandals. One-fifth (22%) of the youth had worked within view of chemicals being applied in nearby fields. In short, the youth did not learn how to properly protect themselves from the dangerous chemicals they were being exposed to day after day.

Pesticide exposure starts early for most farm worker children and goes beyond the fields. According to various studies, women who had high exposure to some pesticides during pregnancy were more likely to have children with neurodevelopmental disorders. Other studies have shown a common association between pesticide exposure in and out of the womb with non-Hodgkin lymphoma and leukemia.

Since many farm worker families live close to the fields, they are exposed to pesticides even when they are not working. Unfortunately, the scientific evidence about the dangerous effects of pesticides on farm worker families has not changed environmental policies, and the U.S. continues to use many of the pesticides that have been banned in other countries.

### **Reflection Questions:**

- How can we protect crops from pests in a less harmful way to farm workers and the environment?
- Why is the U.S. continuing to use pesticides that have been banned in other countries?
- How could more child and adult farm workers have access to the pesticide training they need?

### **Prayer:**

For children and adult farm workers who are exposed to pesticides through their work, from residue that clings to clothes and shoes, and from pesticide drift towards farm worker housing and playgrounds, we pray to the Lord.  
Lord, hear our prayers.

## **Act!**

**Contact your legislators and ask them to support “Protect America’s Children from Toxic Pesticides Act.”**

**The bill amends the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act to fully protect the safety of children and the environment and to remove dangerous pesticides from use.**

## **Learn more**

**Citations and links to additional resources at [bit.ly/hoj2022](https://bit.ly/hoj2022)**

## **About Us**

**National Farm Worker Ministry educates and mobilizes people of faith and conscience to support farm worker led campaigns to improve farm workers’ working and living conditions.**

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