

Compliance Shortfalls Mean Pesticide Risks for Farmworkers, New Report Says

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Compliance with workplace safety requirements for farmworkers who are exposed to dangerous pesticides is lacking, according to a new report from the Center for Agriculture and Food Systems at Vermont Law and Graduate School in partnership with Farmworker Justice and the Harvard Law School Food Law and Policy Clinic. Improving pesticide safety compliance requires stronger enforcement and monitoring, training, shifts in workplace norms and policy change.

The degree of compliance with existing regulations varies from farm to farm, and enforcement can be inconsistent. The health consequences of these failings can be severe, long-term and even fatal for the people who plant, tend, harvest and pack our nation's food. The report, [Precarious Protection: Analyzing Compliance with Pesticide Regulations for Farmworker Safety](#), identifies challenges and solutions.

"The people who feed and sustain us have the right to robust workplace protections from pesticide exposure," said Laurie Beyranevand, director of the Center for Agriculture and Food Systems. "For too long, law and policymakers have ignored these issues. Action is needed now."

Such action would come from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, which establishes and enforces regulations pertaining to pesticides and worker protection.

"Farmworkers risk their health every day to feed us," said Alexis Guild, Vice President, Strategy and Programs at Farmworker Justice. "The EPA must center farmworkers' voices when seeking solutions."

The issues identified in the report include inadequate training, lack of properly posted warnings, pesticide drift, working during periods when entry to treated areas should be restricted, poor personal protective equipment, badly located decontamination supplies, and lack of knowledge for how to recognize and treat toxic exposure.

Uneven power dynamics, the fear of retaliation, low penalties for violations, and other factors make reporting and accountability challenging.

Practical and policy changes can make a difference. These can range from providing workers with interactive and more engaged training to establishing confidentiality protections for those

who report violations, among many others.

“Working with pesticides is inherently risky,” said lead author Emma Scott of the Harvard Law School Food Law and Policy Clinic. “The standards for protecting workers have evolved to better protect workers’ health, but those improvements are only made real when growers understand their obligations and comply with requirements. Policies could go much future to mitigate risk and empower workers to advocate for their own safety.”

The report is the latest from the Center for Food and Agriculture’s Food System Worker Law and Policy Project, which exposes gaps in laws and policies that affect the health and safety of workers throughout the food chain. The Project’s previous two reports are Exposed and at Risk: Opportunities to Strengthen Enforcement of Pesticide Regulations for Farmworker Safety and Essentially Unprotected: A Focus on Farmworker Health Laws and Policies Addressing Pesticide Exposure and Heat-Related Illness.

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Vermont Law and Graduate School’s Center for Agriculture and Food Systems (CAFS) uses law and policy to build a more sustainable and just food system. In partnership with local, regional, national, and international partners, CAFS addresses food system challenges related to food justice, food security, farmland access, farmworkers’ rights, animal welfare, worker protections, the environment, and public health, among others. CAFS works closely with its partners to provide legal services that respond to their needs and develop resources that empower the communities they serve. Through its Food and Agriculture Clinic, Summer Honors Intern program and Research Assistant program, students work directly on projects alongside partners nationwide, engaging in innovative work that spans the food system. Visit www.vermontlaw.edu/cafs to learn more.

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