

Brazil Senate mulls inquiry into agchem use

By Robert Birkett

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A Brazilian Senate commission is considering the creation of a parliamentary investigation into the use of agrochemicals. Senate human rights commission president Ana Rita says that the commission is to evaluate the setting up of a parliamentary commission of inquiry (CPI) to look into the industry. Her comments came at the end of a public audience debate that heard evidence on the use of pesticides in Brazilian agriculture. Ms Rita is also backing calls for a ban on aerial pesticide spraying near urban areas. "It is unacceptable for farms close to urban areas employ this type of spraying," the Senator declared.

The debate covered the effects of pesticide use on food and rural workers but was overshadowed by the evidence of a mother of a child poisoned by a pesticide crop duster. It occurred last May at a school in Goias state, when 29 pupils and some adults were exposed to pesticide from an aerial sprayer, the Senate news service reports. The mother's testimony revealed that the duster sprayed during play time, and that her child is without sufficient medical care. Those responsible have been arrested and posted bail. An MP from the region proposed the initiation of a CPI in response.

Co-ordinator of the permanent campaign against pesticides Cleber Falgado called the incident a "crime", and claimed it was no isolated case. Mr Folgado called for the practice of aerial pesticide spraying to be banned nationwide. "Only 30% of what is sprayed reaches crops, the rest gets into the water or hits people," he complained, labelling the practice "irresponsible".

agchem use

Brazilian association of collective health Abrasco representative Fernando Carneiro cited official statistics showing that, in 2006, pesticides were used on 80% of farms of over 100 ha and over a third of those from 10-100 ha in size. He linked this use to the rise in cancer rates, and added that for every dollar spent on pesticide use, \$1.28 is spent treating illnesses "caused" by their use. The Abrasco revealed that use of pesticides on crops had risen from some 600 m litres in 2002 to well over 800 m litres in 2011.

Mr Folgado complained about the delays in the reassessment of 14 pesticides by the national health surveillance agency, the Anvisa. It has been carrying out the reassessments since 2008, leading to bans and restrictions on half of them (*Agrow passim*). The reassessment has overrun by years.

The agency's representative, Jaime Oliveira, explained that delays have occurred due to structural problems at the agency, and the widespread and established use in Brazil of the active ingredients under assessment. "It is no secret that Anvisa's toxicology departments are undergoing a transition due to the increasingly heavy demands upon them and its inability to cope with those demands." Abrasco's Mr Carneiro highlighted the Anvisa's shortage of personnel, noting that whereas it employed 21 in toxicology, the same office in the US had some 700 staff. The municipal prosecutor from the Goias school's town called on the agency to suspend the sale and use of the ais under the "precautionary principle". He also called on the state to help those affected by the spraying in May, noting that "no toxicologist from the state had yet attended to them".

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