

Pesticides

Prepare by National Health Systems Reform Office

Pesticide imports have been increasing rapidly. Farmers are subject to intensive advertising campaigns, with little regulation of advertisers.



Farmers face ever-increasing risks from pesticides. At the same time, consumers have no choice but to buy vegetables and fruit containing pesticide residues. Pesticides are an important health risk, contributing to many deaths and illnesses among the Thai population.

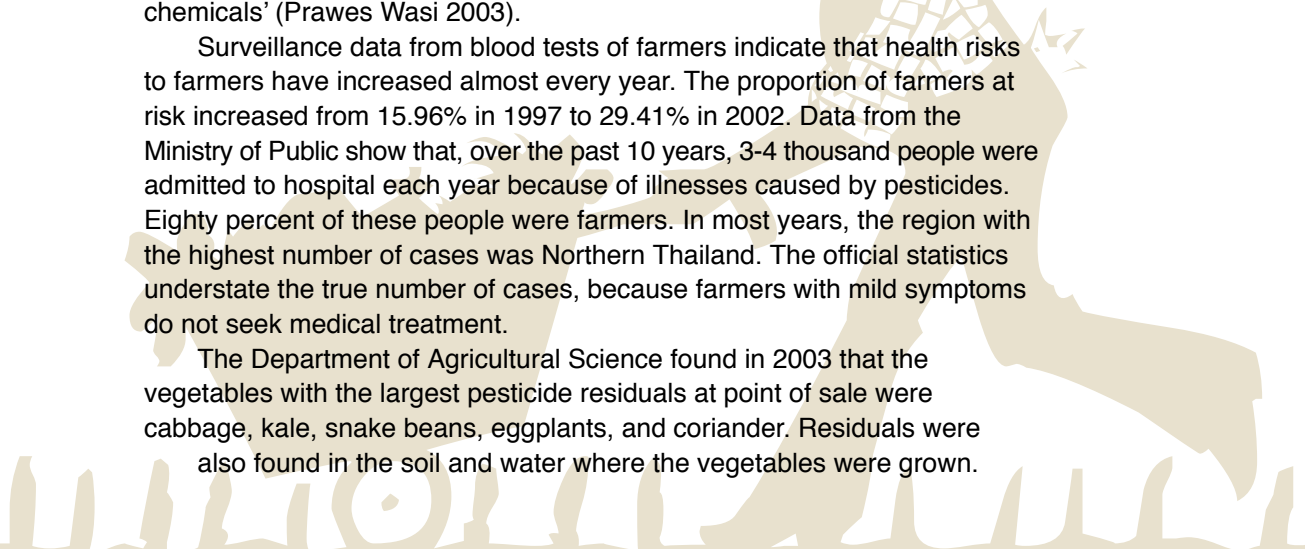


The volume of pesticides imported into Thailand increased by a factor of four in the ten years between 1994 and 2004. The increase was caused by policies to rapidly expand agricultural exports and make Thailand the kitchen of the world. The Office for Agricultural Economics notes that, although agricultural production per hectare has been increasing at only 2.5% per year, pesticide use per hectare has been increasing at 13.2% per hectare. Of the 20 most-commonly imported chemicals in 2003, four have a '1a' rating, meaning that they are highly dangerous.

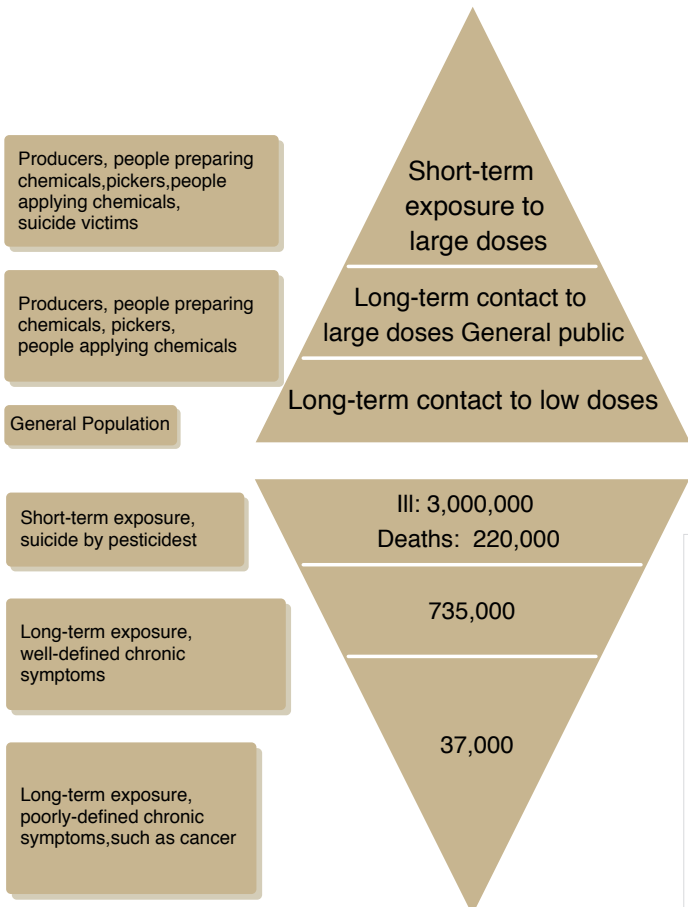
The main reason for misuse of pesticides is misinformation, originating from many sources. Because some chemicals have over one hundred trade names, farmers sometimes unknowingly apply the same chemical more than once. Many farmers still like to prepare drug 'cocktails' of many different chemicals, which leads to overuse of some chemicals. The chemicals industry is highly competitive, and producers advertise their products heavily. There are no clear regulations controlling advertising of agricultural chemicals (National Health Council, 2004). The result is a land 'awash with chemicals' (Prawes Wasi 2003).

Surveillance data from blood tests of farmers indicate that health risks to farmers have increased almost every year. The proportion of farmers at risk increased from 15.96% in 1997 to 29.41% in 2002. Data from the Ministry of Public show that, over the past 10 years, 3-4 thousand people were admitted to hospital each year because of illnesses caused by pesticides. Eighty percent of these people were farmers. In most years, the region with the highest number of cases was Northern Thailand. The official statistics understate the true number of cases, because farmers with mild symptoms do not seek medical treatment.

The Department of Agricultural Science found in 2003 that the vegetables with the largest pesticide residuals at point of sale were cabbage, kale, snake beans, eggplants, and coriander. Residuals were also found in the soil and water where the vegetables were grown.



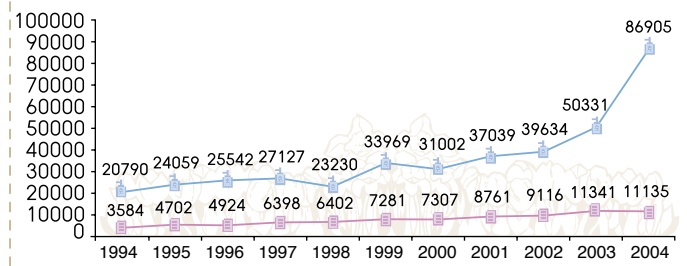
Groups at risk of pesticide-related illnesses



Source: WHO, cited in Study of the Health Effects of Pesticides, 2005

Estimates of the number of people across the world affected by pesticides each year

Imports of pesticides

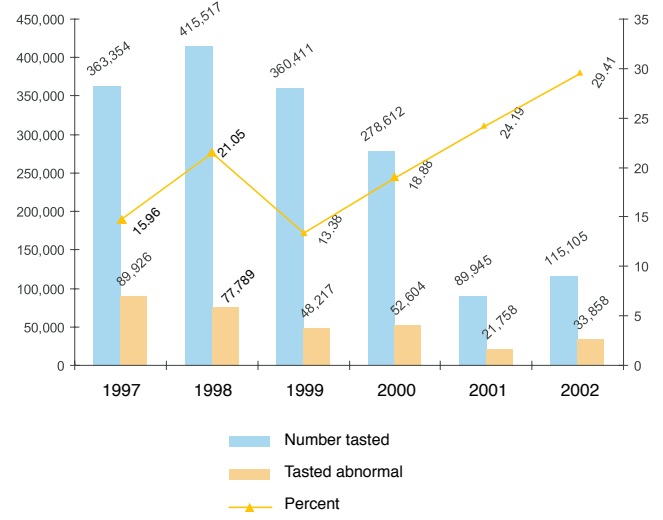


Source: Poisons Section, Office for Pest Control and Agricultural Materials, Department of Agriculture

Value (millions of baht)
Volume (tons)

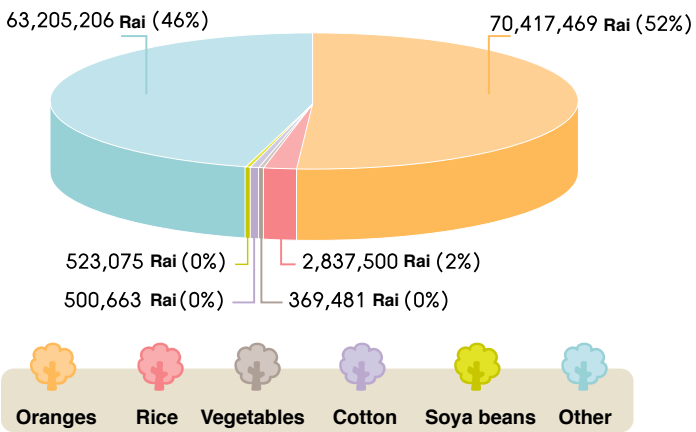
Note: The figures for 2003 do not include pesticides for a few species. These extra pesticides have a combined volume of 127 tons, and a value of 39 million baht.

Number of farmers facing health's cholinesterase level 1997-2002



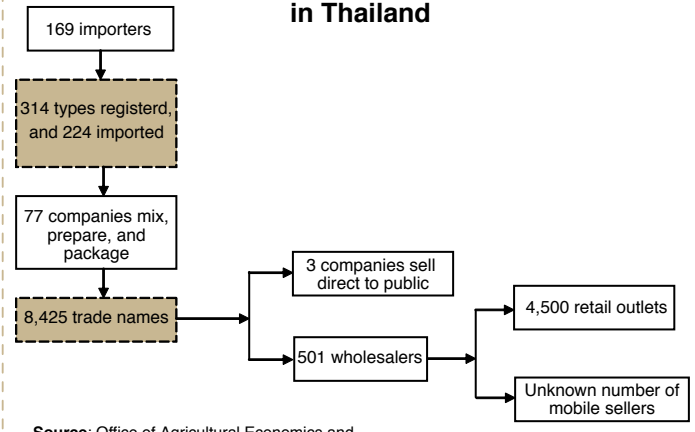
Source: Division of Occupational Health, Ministry of Public Health

Area of land (in rai) where pesticides are applied



Source: Division of Entomology and Zoology, Department of Agriculture, 1994

The Distribution and Sale of Pesticides in Thailand



Source: Office of Agricultural Economics and Department of Agriculture, 2001