

Navigating the Future of Food Security: The Dual Role of Pesticides in Modern Agriculture and Environmental Health

Sani Matilda, Agricultural and Bio-environmental engineering, Federal College of Agriculture Akure, Nigeria

Abstract

The global increase in pesticide use is linked to the rising demand for food brought on by population expansion, particularly in developing countries in Asia, Africa, Central America, and South America. Pesticides have been essential in increasing agricultural productivity, preserving crop quality, and ensuring a steady supply of food. Despite these benefits, decades of ongoing production and usage of pesticides have led to grave concerns about the damaging effects these chemicals have on the environment and human health, especially when they are ingested into dietary chains. Scientists from all around the globe have looked at the usage of pesticides and food product contamination in an effort to address these issues. This summary covers research from the past and present on pesticide usage, pesticide accumulation in food, and reduction strategies that have been studied and reported by scholars throughout the years. Continuous monitoring of residual pesticide levels in soil crops, fruits, vegetables, and animal products is critically needed in developing nations to ensure that they stay below Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs).

Keywords: Pesticide Use, Sustainable Agriculture, Environmental Impact, Health Risks, Food Safety, Integrated Pest Management

Introduction

Access to nutritious food is a basic human right for all, irrespective of socioeconomic, cultural, or social status. Forecasts suggest the world population will expand to 8.7 billion by 2060 and further to 10.70 billion by 2080, necessitating enhanced food availability. The agricultural sector is poised for considerable growth in the upcoming decades. By 2060, a significant portion of global population growth is expected to be concentrated in just eight nations—India, Ethiopia, Pakistan, Egypt, Nigeria, the Philippines, Tanzania, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This shift will result in a reordering of the world's largest countries by population size. Among the world's most rapidly expanding economies are the 46 Least Developed Countries (LDCs). In some of these countries, the population is projected to quadruple from 2022 to 2060, intensifying pressure on resources and complicating the accomplishment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

1. Demands from the Population and Agricultural Growth

With estimates of 7.7 billion people by 2050 and 14.4 billion by 2090, the world's population poses a serious threat to the agriculture industry. In order to meet the growing population's nutritional demands, agricultural productivity must rise by 15% over the next ten years and by a significant 50% by 2050. The need for improved farming techniques to keep up with the rising demand of nourishment is highlighted by this situation.

2. Agrochemicals Play an Important Role

The use of agrochemicals, especially fertilisers and insecticides, is crucial in the effort to increase agricultural output. At this crucial point in the agri-food sector, the emphasis is shifting to using these agrochemicals effectively and efficiently in order to achieve sustainability. The goal is obvious: increase productivity while simultaneously feeding the world's expanding population with wholesome food.

3. Techniques for Integrated Pest Management (IPM)

The term "Integrated Pest Management" (IPM) refers to a comprehensive strategy that addresses the social, economic, and environmental issues related to agricultural insect control. This strategy includes biological, chemical, physical, and cultural actions in a well balanced combination with other pest management tactics. The goal is to grow wholesome crops with the least amount of pesticides possible, therefore lowering the dangers to the environment and public health. Therefore, putting an emphasis on ecological balance and efficient pest control, integrated pest management (IPM) is an environmentally sound approach to pest management.

4. Guidelines and International Pesticide Management

The World Health Organisation, Food and Agriculture Organisation, and other international organisations collaborated to create the Global Code of Behaviour on Chemical Management, which lays forth standards for the safe use and handling of pesticides. But adoption patterns differ throughout the world, with more liberal methods in poorer countries and more legal frameworks in areas like the European Union. This discrepancy draws attention to persistent problems with pesticide management, like as problems with out-of-date and expired pesticides, which are especially prevalent in African nations.

5. Effects and Application of Pesticides

The bulk of pesticide treatments used globally consist of herbicides, insecticides, and toxic compounds, with herbicides being the most often used. Although these substances are necessary to avoid crop yield losses and to provide a consistent supply of agricultural products, misuse and overuse of them have had detrimental effects on the surroundings and public health. The primary source of chemical residue in food crops is the direct sprinkling of pesticides on developing plants, underscoring the need of more regulated and intentional use.

6. Trends in the Global Pesticide Market

The use of pesticides has been steadily rising worldwide, with the USA and Europe consuming a large share of this total. It is known that pests may lower agricultural production by between twenty and forty percent every year, resulting in large financial losses. It is clear that pesticides are used extensively to reduce insect damage to a variety of crops, but rising worries about abuse and pollution—particularly in China and other developing nations—highlight the need for new environmentally friendly methods.

7. Upcoming Difficulties and Sustainable Farming Methods

The emphasis of the agriculture industry is shifting to minimising the negative effects of pesticides as it struggles to embrace sustainable methods and increase productivity. It's critical to prioritise environmentally friendly pest control techniques and lessen reliance on dangerous pesticides. To fulfil the needs of the growing global population while maintaining environmental integrity, the industry must continue to innovate and develop sustainable agriculture approaches.

Talk about Pesticides: Their Effects on the Environment, Human Health, and Biodiversity

Bee Population Decline and the Effect of Pesticides

More than 20,000 bee species are necessary for the pollination of over 90% of the 109 main crops grown worldwide. Bee populations have dramatically decreased in recent decades, mostly as a result of human activity, particularly the usage of dangerous pesticides known as these compounds (e.g., acetamiprid, clothianidin, imidacloprid). These pesticides are known to be a key contributing cause to the fall in bee numbers and have polluted a large amount of the world's honey supply. The equilibrium of the environment and biodiversity are seriously threatened by this circumstance.

Insect Species Decline and Environmental Pollution

Research indicates a concerning pattern of diminishing numbers of insects across many areas, including the Orbroicher Bruch wildlife reserve, where a 79% reduction in population has been noted. Hoverfly declines provide as another evidence of the harm which synthetic pesticides—especially those containing chlorinated chemicals—do to biodiversity and the environment. These pesticides, which are often environmentally persistent, endanger a variety of living species outside of their designated regions of use.

Hazards to Human Health and Pesticide Contamination

When chemical pesticides are used without appropriate safety precautions, agricultural workers may be exposed to direct health risks via skin contact or inhalation. The hazards to health are greater in poorer nations because a large number of farmers lack formal education and expertise about proper chemical handling. When these agrochemicals are handled and applied improperly, contamination may occur in many ways and impact human health either directly via consumption or through environmental routes.

Continuous Organic Pollutants and Destruction of the Food Chain

Many widely used pesticides are considered persistent organic pollutants (POPs) due to their extended half-lives and low biodegradability, which cause them to accumulate in living tissues. Elevated levels of pesticides in food sources have the potential to contaminate the whole food chain, posing serious risks to human health and food safety.

Effects of Pesticides on Groundwater Contamination and Aquatic Life

Frequent use of pesticides may overburden agricultural soils, which, under the right circumstances, might promote plant absorption. Leachates of pesticides have the potential to pollute groundwater and other bodies of water, endangering aquatic life, animals, and humans who depend on these sources of water.

Effects of Pesticide Exposure on Health

The World Health Organisation estimates that three million farmers in developing countries suffer from severe pesticide poisoning year, which often leads to numerous deaths. The use of pesticides has been linked to an increased risk of Parkinson's disease, malignancies, and infertile in males. It is important to use and handle these substances with caution since research on both people and animals has shown that they may have neurotoxic effects and alter hormone levels.

Effects of Endocrine Disruption on Reproductive Health

As endocrine disruption agents, certain pesticides imitate or interfere with hormone functioning, which may be hazardous. Numerous health problems, such as malignancies, infertility, reproductive troubles, and developmental impairments, may be brought on by this imbalance.

Conclusion

Pesticide production has risen as a result of the expansion and evolution of agricultural operations in response to the growing global population. The pressing need to feed an ever-increasing population is the main cause of this increase. Because they are so inexpensive, several pesticides are still in use even if their usage is prohibited owing to their toxicity. Because pesticides are widely used and often used without proper knowledge, they have unintentionally entered the food chain and are now impacting not just the crops but also the people who eat them.

It is necessary to use care while applying pesticides on farms and when ingesting possibly contaminated goods due to the serious health hazards linked with their intake. To protect the public's health and maintain sustainable agricultural practices, there is an urgent need for increased understanding and appropriate pesticide use methods.

Reference

- Adjrah Y, et al. "Survey of pesticide application on vegetables in the Littoral area of Togo." *Annals of Agricultural and Environmental Medicine*, 2013; 20: 715-720.
- Ministry of Food, Agriculture, and Livestock (MINFAL). "Agricultural Statistics of Pakistan." 2004.
- Ahoudi H, et al. "Assessment of pesticides residues contents in the vegetables cultivated in an urban area of Lome (southern Togo) and their risks on public health and the environment, Togo." *International Journal of Biological and Chemical Sciences*, 2017; 12: 2172-2185.
- Alkema L. "The global burden of disease fertility forecasts: Summary of the approach used and associated statistical concerns." 2013.
- Akhtar S, et al. "Pesticides residue in milk and milk products: A mini-review." *Pakistan Journal of Analytical and Environmental Chemistry*, 2017; 18: 37-45.
- Akoto O, et al. "Health risk assessment of pesticide residue in maize and cowpea from Ejura, Ghana." *Chemosphere*, 2013; 92: 67-73.
- Akhtar MW, et al. "Impact of pesticides use in agriculture: their benefits and hazards." *International Toxicology*, 2009; 2: 1.
- Al-Taher F, et al. "Reduction of pesticide residues in tomatoes and other produce." *Journal of Food Protection*, 2013; 76: 510-510.