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## **SUMMARY OF WORKSHOP: DESIGNING A PESTICIDE FORUM: IDENTIFYING COMMON ELEMENTS OF A FORUM AS WELL AS SPECIFIC INFORMATION NEEDS FOR PESTICIDES**

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### **GOALS**

- Identify common elements of a forum as well as specific information needs for pesticides

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

Questions presented by facilitators:

- Who are the key actors or stakeholders?
- What are the priority information needs?
- What are the existing institutional and electronic information networks?

### **2 PAPERS**

- Background information on the U.S.- Mexico Pesticide Inspector Exchange Program that has resulted in the training of over 60 pesticide inspectors in both countries
- Fact sheet on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) – United Nations Environment Programme Chemical Information Exchange Program which will provide training to chemical managers in Central America and Mexico in using the Internet to access needed information and in promoting a regional exchange of information on pesticides

### **3 DISCUSSION SUMMARY**

With the majority of participants representing the Central America region and the United States, discussions focused on the establishment of a Pesticide Forum

for Central America. After all participants shared their experiences and interests regarding pesticides, four short presentations were given on existing regional programs. Marco Gonzalez provided a summary of Comisión Cebtro-american de ambiente y Desarolla's pesticide related activities, Adele Cardenas (EPA) described the accomplishments of the U.S.-Mexico Pesticide Inspector Exchange Program, Roberto Morales summarized U.S. Agency for International Development regional environment program, and Keith Chanon (EPA) presented information on the EPA-UNEP project to train chemical managers in the region on using the Internet to access chemical information.

Substantive discussions addressed the wide-range of pesticide issues of importance in Central America. Due to the need for understanding these issues regarding pesticides, time was not sufficient for discussing the detailed requirements of a functioning Pesticide Forum. Rather, the group agreed to first focus on identifying the important stakeholders that are involved or affected by the use of pesticides in the region and to identify the priority information needs of the region

As pesticide issues span across the environment, health, and agriculture sectors and affect numerous stakeholder groups, it is clear that compliance and enforcement activities are an important

component to overall pesticide management. Nonetheless, a number of other priorities surfaced that demonstrate the complexity of regulating pesticides and educating users and the general public about their risks as well as the benefits that can be attained through investments in sustainable alternatives. Having identified the important stakeholders and the priority information needs of the region, additional efforts are needed to further define the scope and operationalization of the Pesticide Forum.

Key Stakeholders Involved in Pesticide Activities:

- Non-governmental organizations
- Academia
- Industry
- Commodity groups
- Farmworkers
- Community organizations
- International organizations
- General consumers

Priority Information Needs of the Central American Region:

- Information on alternative sustainable agricultural practices (i.e., organic agriculture, integrated pest management, non-synthetic pesticides);
- Market information required for domestic sales and export of foods;
- Information and guidelines for inspections;
- Farmworker safety information; and
- Information for developing enforceable regulations

Participants also identified numerous issues and challenges in strengthening overall pesticide management practices and for promoting the adoption of alternative sustainable agricultural practices.

While Central America hosts some small-scale projects to promote the development and use of alternative sustainable agriculture practices that do not rely solely

on synthetic pesticides, the group recognized that large-scale efforts to promote alternatives and the exchange of technological information is needed. To facilitate this cultural transformation, information exchange and awareness raising activities are needed to highlight the environmental, health, and economic benefits associated with sustainable practices. This education effort must target all stakeholder entities, including government and the general public. A central function of the Pesticide Forum could be to provide information on the wide range of alternative practices available to farmers within the region.

The multi-dimensional market in pesticides involves the international trade of pesticides as products, the international trade in foods containing pesticide residues, and the international migration of farmworkers who apply pesticides in more than one country. These aspects directly and indirectly impact pesticide use practices. The international trade in pesticide products necessitates national capacity to monitor and enforce import and export controls. National and international food safety standards necessitate enforceable domestic regulations. Lastly, the migration of farmworkers requires that countries collaborate in educating and training this population group to assure their protection and that of their families.

A central aspect of the international market in pesticides involves the price of agricultural commodities and strategies for gaining market share. The market price of pesticides will likely influence the management practices chosen by the farmer. As commodity prices fall, the farmer may seek alternative pest control strategies that are less costly. This can either result in the farmer adopting non-chemical control methods or reverting to using older, lower cost pesticides that may pose greater risks to the environment. Also, in some countries, government subsidies and policies of

financial lending institutions encourage pesticide use

International consumer demand can also drive decisions at the farm level. Specifically, the growing demand for pesticide free produce and expectation that growers follow sustainable agricultural principles introduces new market forces. To attract this growing consumer sector, farmers will inevitably need to adopt sustainable agricultural practices. Certification schemes (e.g., organic certification) will undoubtedly influence the decisions of growers in their choice of using certain types of pesticides.

The Pesticide Forum should play a role in providing growers with up-to-date information on market trends and requirements as well as information needed to develop regionally harmonized regulations.

Enforceable regulations are critical for assuring the safe use of pesticides. In Central America, there is an undeniable need for technical information that will assist countries in establishing and implementing effective regulations. In this area, the Pesticide Forum can be used for disseminating needed information in addition to facilitating the harmonization of approaches to pesticide regulation throughout the region. The experience and input from the compliance and enforcement community will greatly improve the effectiveness of newly established regulations.

A critical tool for the compliance and enforcement of pesticide regulations is the use of inspections. Inspections of farms and pesticide manufacturing and formulating facilities will help assure compliance. Therefore, information and training for inspectors will strengthen capacity in the region. A possible activity that can be facilitated through the forum is the expansion of the U.S.-Mexico Pesticide Inspector Exchange Program. The program would enable inspectors from Central America to receive training in Mexico and the U.S.

As a sub-population that can incur

high levels of pesticide exposure, it is important to provide farmworkers with proper education and training on the safe handling and use of pesticides. In this area, the Pesticide Forum can provide basic information and training resources. For example, information and materials from existing training programs in Costa Rica, Guatemala, and the joint U.S.-Mexico Worker Protection Program can be shared and disseminated through the forum.

#### **4 CONCLUSION**

The group agreed that additional work and consultation is required in order to prioritize and narrow the issues for inclusion in the Pesticide Forum and to establish links with existing regional networks. Moreover, the operational design of the forum and its integration into the INECE network needs to be addressed. Participants agreed to participate in future consultations to further develop the Pesticide Forum.

From the workshop discussions, it is clear that pesticides present a complex set of issues and problems that cannot be addressed through any single means. Changes must be made at the government, industry, grower, and consumer levels. While enforceable legal requirements are an important element, in the context of Central America, the group emphasized the need to promote a cultural shift toward the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices. This will require the participation of all stakeholder entities.

The Pesticide Forum should become a valuable tool for facilitating the adoption of alternative pest control strategies. The participants of the workshop recognized that further work is needed to define the scope and design of the forum and committed to participate in the continual design and development of the forum.