

Need for a Pesticide Management

Why in news?

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Union government is working with Pesticide management bill 2017 to replace archaic Insecticides Act, 1968.

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What are the impacts of unregulated pesticide usage in India?

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- Recently within a few weeks, about 50 farmers have died due to use of pesticides in Maharashtra and over 1,000 have suffered critical ailments.

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- The use of imported, untested pesticides and unregistered technical procedures could be a reason for the deaths.

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- Farmers continue to commit suicide in large numbers and one primary cause is the sale of misbranded (substandard, spurious, expired) pesticides which disappoints them during harvests.

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- Along with pesticide misuse the inordinate use of antibiotics in the poultry and dairy industry is a major reason for human diseases, monumental species loss and environmental damage.

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What are the flaws with existing regulations mechanisms?

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- The larger pesticide companies (brand owners and marketing agents) generally outsource production to smaller manufacturers.

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- The quality degradation happens in the outsourcing stage and the smaller manufacturers can't be prosecuted because the Central law only stipulates

prosecution of the manufacturer.

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- When the licence to sell pesticides is issued, applicants declare a “responsible person” to be held accountable for violations.

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- The person is usually a low-paid employee, who over time becomes unreachable, even serving the prosecution notice becomes difficult.

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- Most pesticide samples simply don’t fail the test, this is because of conniving officers who don’t follow procedures and for a “sample failure” to be legally valid, samples have to fail consecutively.

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- The cumbersome documentation procedure allows the second sample to expire before it’s tested, rendering the process invalid which makes the crime intractable.

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What measures need to be encompassed in new regulation?

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- The declaration of responsible person, therefore, has to be among the top five financial beneficiaries of the firm and the fine should be computed as a percentage of the total sales in the state.

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- Mandatory e-documentation (as per the IT Act, 2000) for agriculture departments will expedite the process and increase transparency.

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- Currently, only a magistrate can order suspension of pesticide sales over an evident violation, these powers need to be delegated to a pesticide inspector.

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- The Central Insecticide Board and Registration Authority should be restructured and many of its powers be transferred to the states.

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- All agriculture-input packaging must mandatorily have a bar code giving product information such that the bar code will sync with the GST and the e-way bill.

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- States should make retailers log all agriculture input sales onto state government servers, allowing for traceability from the factory floor to farmer’s field and for regulation enforcement.

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- Such digitisation at the ground-level will facilitate a farmer grievance

redressal mechanism to make the system accountable.

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Source: Indian Express

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