

# **Pesticide Registration under FIFRA: Providing Stakeholders with Certainty through the Pesticide Registration Improvement Act**

Senate Agriculture Committee  
Thursday, May 11, 2017

Testimony of Virginia Ruiz, Farmworker Justice

Chairman Roberts, Ranking Member Stabenow, and members of the Agriculture Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony this morning. My name is Virginia Ruiz and I am the Director of Occupational and Environmental Health at Farmworker Justice.

Farmworker Justice is a national organization that supports farmworkers in the US to improve their living and working conditions, health, occupational safety, and access to justice. Farmworker Justice has been a member of the PRIA Coalition, along with the Natural Resources Defense Council and pesticide industry representatives, since the initial passage of the 2003 Pesticide Registration Improvement Act, and we support its reauthorization in the form of the Pesticide Registration Enhancement Act.

Under PRIA, money set aside from pesticide registration fees supports worker protection activities. The PRIA set-asides fund important programs at EPA, including

- pesticide safety training for farmworkers and pesticide handlers;

- the development of worker and employer training materials on pesticide safety and implementation of the Worker Protection Standard and the Certified Pesticide Applicator rule;
- education and training for medical providers to diagnose and treat pesticide poisonings; and
- support for state public health agencies to maintain pesticide injury surveillance programs.

Farmworkers, and especially those who mix and apply pesticides, face substantial risk of becoming poisoned by pesticides because they work with pesticides at their greatest concentrations and strengths. They come into contact with pesticides on a daily basis. The pesticide residues that remain on their work clothes and skin when they return home from work can also expose members of their families and cause injury.

Pesticide exposure causes farmworkers to suffer more chemical-related injuries and illnesses than any other workforce in the nation. The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that up to 3,000 farmworkers suffer acute pesticide poisoning every year through occupational exposures, including irritated eyes, rashes, nausea, dizziness, headaches, and shortness of breath. These estimates don't include those who suffer long-term effects of exposure, such as cancer, Parkinson's disease, asthma, birth defects and neurological harms, including developmental delays and learning disabilities. In fact, EPA has found that the greatest risk from the pesticide chlorpyrifos – which can harm children's brains - is to agricultural communities and workers.

Many of these acute poisonings are preventable through basic workplace protections and worker safety education, such as those required by the EPA's Worker Protection Standard (WPS). The WPS applies to hired workers and pesticide handlers involved in the

production of agricultural crops. In November 2015, after more than a decade of stakeholder meetings, study and consideration, EPA finalized revisions to the WPS that provide critical improvements designed to reduce the risk of illness or injury resulting from farmworkers' occupational exposures to pesticides.

Also, in January of this year, after more than 40 years, EPA updated its regulations concerning the certification of, and training requirements for, individuals who apply restricted use pesticides (RUPs), which are some of the more dangerous pesticides available on the market. The updated WPS and CPA rule provide long-overdue protections for farmworkers, their families and rural communities across the US from exposure to pesticides. These regulations call for basic preventive measures that will save millions of dollars in medical costs and lost productivity due to illness. These common sense measures include annual basic safety training, posting of application and safety information, meaningful hazard communication, functioning personal protective equipment, adequate supervision of non-certified pesticide applicators, and the prohibition of children from handling pesticides.

PRIA funding is necessary to help EPA meaningfully implement these important safety standards. But these worker protection activities are meaningless if the WPS and CPA rule are weakened and rolled back. PRIA set-asides help to provide employer compliance assistance and worker safety training. However, these funds must complement, not replace EPA funding for other important pesticide safety, worker protection and environmental justice programs. Stable funding for the Agency as a whole is vital to provide occupational and environmental education for workers, their families and rural communities, and to prevent adverse effects from pesticide exposure.

Farmworker Justice requests that this committee reauthorize PRIA as quickly as possible, and without any changes or amendments to existing language. Thank you for the opportunity to address this important issue. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.