ISSN: 3060-4737 Volume 3, Issue 10 IF(Impact Factor) 10.98 / 2026

USE OF PESTICIDES AND INSECTICIDES ON CROPS WHICH ARE RESULTING IN CANCER

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Silent Harvester: How Agricultural Pesticides and Insecticides Impact Long-Term Health

- **Abstract / Introduction**

- Modern industrial agriculture relies heavily on synthetic chemicals to boost yield and control pests. However, growing epidemiological research links chronic, low-dose exposure to agricultural insecticides and pesticides with increased cancer risks. This article outlines key pathways of exposure, biological mechanisms, documented cancer links, and actionable policy solutions.

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1. Routes of Exposure

Humans encounter agricultural chemicals primarily through three avenues:

- **Occupational Exposure:** Farmers, pesticide applicators, and field laborers face direct contact via inhalation and skin absorption during mixing, spraying, and harvesting.
- **Environmental Proximity:** Rural populations residing near heavily sprayed agricultural zones absorb drift chemicals through ambient air, topsoil, and local groundwater.
- **Consumer Residues:** The general public ingests trace amounts of systemic insecticides and persistent organochlorines present on unwashed produce and processed goods.

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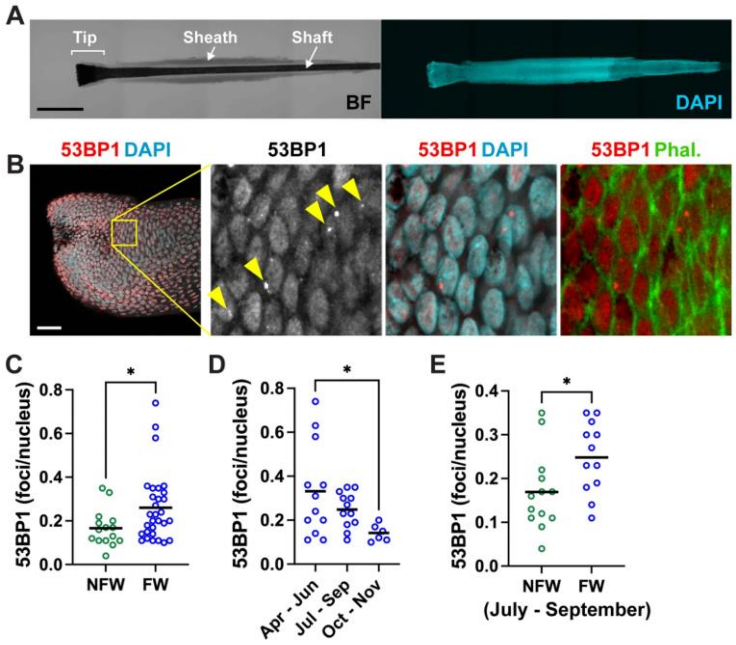




2. Key Biological Mechanisms

How chemical compounds trigger cellular damage leading to oncogenesis:

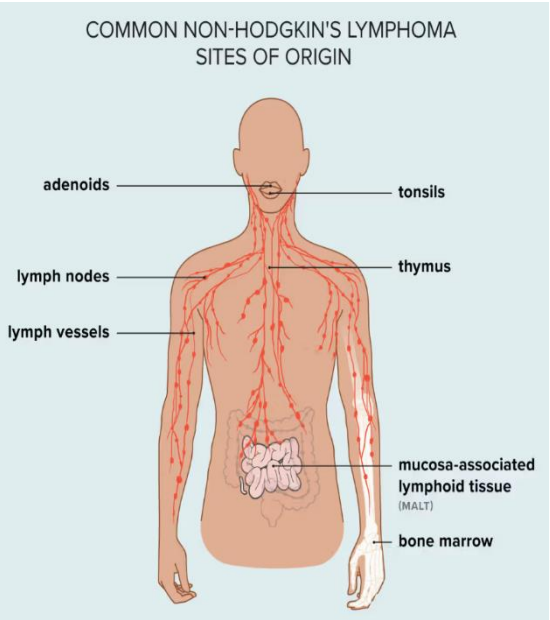
- **DNA Damage & Genotoxicity:** Certain compounds induce single- and double-strand DNA breaks, causing mutations that escape normal cellular repair mechanisms.
- **Endocrine Disruption:** Insecticides (such as organophosphates and synthetic pyrethroids) mimic or block hormones, promoting hormone-receptor-positive cancers.
- **Oxidative Stress:** Chemical toxicity elevates reactive oxygen species (ROS), causing lipid peroxidation, chronic inflammation, and cellular degeneration.

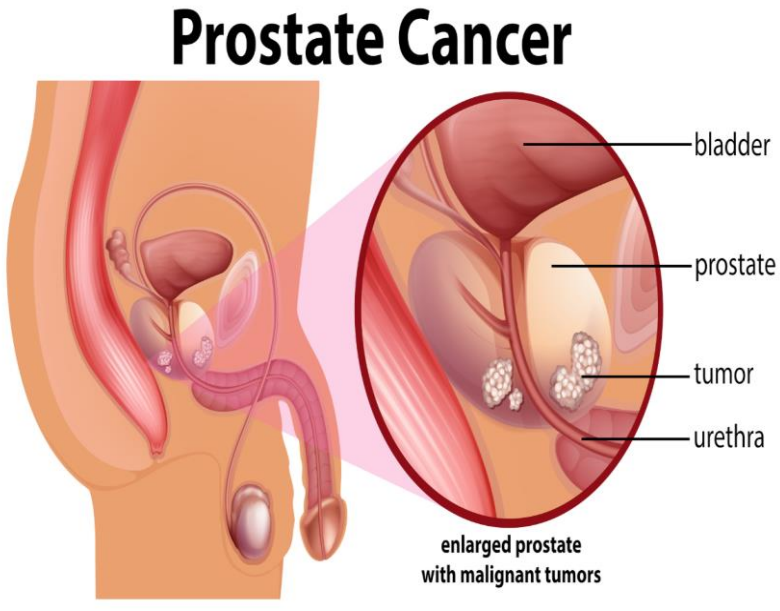


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3. High-Risk Cancers & Associated Compounds

Cancer Type	Primary Chemical Classes / Examples	Primary Exposed Group
Non-Hodgkin Lymphoma (NHL) & Leukemia	Organophosphates (e.g., Diazinon, Malathion), Glyphosate, Lindane	Agricultural workers & children in farming areas
Prostate Cancer	Organochlorines (e.g., DDT derivatives), Fonofos	Male agricultural applicators
Breast & Ovarian Cancers	Endocrine-disrupting pesticides, Organophosphates	Female farmworkers & consumers with high dietary intake
Multiple Myeloma & Bladder Cancer	Permethrin, Captan, Chlorpyrifos	Long-term occupational applicators





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4. Mitigation Strategies & Solutions

1. **Integrated Pest Management (IPM):** Prioritizing biological controls, crop rotation, and targeted non-chemical solutions before applying synthetic sprays.
2. **Regulatory Overhauls:** Enforcing stricter Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs) and phasing out compounds categorized as carcinogenic or endocrine-disrupting by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC).
3. **Safety Gear & Protocol:** Mandating certified Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and drift-reduction technology during application.
4. **Organic Transition Support:** Providing subsidies and technical assistance for farmers transitioning toward organic farming practices.

Comprehensive Monograph: Agricultural Chemical Exposure, Carcinogenesis, and Public Health Solutions

Abstract

The global expansion of intensive agricultural production relies heavily on synthetic chemicals, including herbicides, insecticides, fungicides, and rodenticides. While these agents have enhanced crop yields and reduced vector-borne disease vectors, extensive epidemiological and molecular research links chronic, low-dose exposure to various malignant neoplasms. This comprehensive study examines the chemical taxonomy of agricultural compounds, exposure vectors, cellular and molecular carcinogenic mechanisms, site-specific cancer etiology, structural barriers to regulation, and sustainable agricultural alternatives.





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Section 1: Chemical Taxonomy and Agricultural Utilization

Modern pesticides encompass diverse chemical classes designed to disrupt physiological processes in target pests. However, many pathways targeted in pests—such as neurotransmission and hormonal signaling—share functional homology with human biochemical systems.

1.1 Insecticides

- **Organochlorines (e.g., DDT, Dieldrin, Lindane, Chlordane):** Highly lipophilic, persistent organic pollutants (POPs) that bioaccumulate across trophic levels. Although banned or restricted in many developed nations under the Stockholm Convention, residual presence in soil and human adipose tissue remains an ongoing exposure risk.
- **Organophosphates (e.g., Chlorpyrifos, Diazinon, Malathion, Parathion):** Esters of phosphoric acid that inhibit acetylcholinesterase ($AChE$), causing accumulation of acetylcholine at neuromuscular junctions. Widely utilized due to lower environmental persistence than organochlorines, yet exhibiting high neurotoxicity and genotoxicity.
- **Carbamates (e.g., Carbaryl, Carbofuran, Methomyl):** Organic compounds derived from carbamic acid. Similar to organophosphates, they inhibit $AChE$ reversibly, but several metabolites demonstrate alkylating properties capable of direct DNA binding.
- **Synthetic Pyrethroids (e.g., Permethrin, Cypermethrin, Deltamethrin):** Synthetic analogs of natural pyrethrins derived from *Chrysanthemum* flowers. Designed to prolong open states of voltage-gated sodium channels in insect nerve membranes. Many act as endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs) in mammalian systems.

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Insecticide	Class	Recommended Use[1]	WHO hazard classification[2]
Bendiocarb	Carbamate	IRS	II
Propoxur	Carbamate	IRS	II
DDT	Organochloride	IRS	II
Fenitrothion	Organophosphate	IRS, Space Spray	II
Malathion	Organophosphate	IRS, Space Spray	III
Pirimiphos-methyl	Organophosphate	IRS, Space Spray	III
α-Cypermethrin	Pyrethroid	IRS, LLIN	II
Bifenthrin	Pyrethroid	IRS	II
Cyfluthrin	Pyrethroid	IRS, LLIN, Space Spray	II
Deltamethrin	Pyrethroid	IRS, LLIN, Space Spray	II
Etofenprox	Pyrethroid	IRS, LLIN, Space Spray	U
λ-Cyhalothrin	Pyrethroid	IRS, LLIN, Space Spray	II
Permethrin	Pyrethroid	LLIN, Space Spray	II
D-Phenothrin	Pyrethroid	Space Spray	U
Resmethrin	Pyrethroid	Space Spray	III

1.2 Herbicides

- **Glyphosate (N-(phosphonomethyl)glycine):** The world's most widely applied broad-spectrum herbicide, operating via inhibition of 5-enolpyruvylshikimate-3-phosphate synthase (EPSPS) in the shikimate pathway. In 2015, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) classified glyphosate as "probably carcinogenic to humans" (Group 2A).
- **Phenoxy Herbicides (e.g., 2,4-D, MCPA):** Synthetic auxins inducing uncontrolled plant growth. Historically combined with 2,4,5-T (containing 2,3,7,8-tetrachlorodibenzo-p-dioxin [TCDD] contamination) in Agent Orange.
- **Triazines (e.g., Atrazine, Simazine):** Photosynthetic inhibitors that disrupt Electron Transport Chain (ETC) processes in weeds. Atrazine is a potent endocrine disruptor that alters cytochrome P450 aromatase expression.

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Trt no.	Treatment name	*Rate (g a.i. ha^{-1})
1	Hand-weeded check	—
2	Topramazone	12.5
3	Topramazone	25
4	Bentazon	475
5	Bentazon	950
6	Fomesafen	140
7	Fomesafen	280
8	Topramazone+bentazon	12.5 + 475
9	Topramazone+bentazon	25 + 950
10	Cloransulam-methyl	17
11	Cloransulam-methyl	34
12	Cloransulam-methyl+bentazon	17 + 475
13	Cloransulam-methyl+bentazon	34 + 950
14	Fomesafen+bentazon	140 + 840
15	Fomesafen+bentazon	280 + 1683
16	Fluthiacet-methyl	4
17	Fluthiacet-methyl	8
18	Fluthiacet-methyl+bentazon	4 + 475
19	Fluthiacet-methyl+bentazon	8 + 950

*g a.i. ha^{-1}: grams active ingredient per hectare.

Active ingredient	Fungicide	Chemical class
Azoxystrobin (23.1%, w/w)	Amistar	Strobilurine
Bupirimate (27.2%, w/w)	Nimrod	Pyrimidine
Captan (80%)	Captan	Pthalamide
Fenarimol (11.4%, w/w)	Rubigan	Pyrimidine
Fenpropimorph (79.5%, w/w)	Corbel	Morpholine
Fosetyl-aluminium (80%)	Standon Fosetyl-AL	Organophosphorus
Iprodione (25%, w/w)	Rovral Flo	Dicarboximide
Kresoxim-methyl (50%)	Stroby	Strobilurine
Myclobutanil (20%, w/w)	Robut 20	Triazole
Pyrimethanil (37.4%, w/w)	Scala	Pyrimidine
Quinoxyfen (41.32%, w/w)	Fortress	Quinoline
Sulphur (58.8%, w/w)	Sulphur Flowable	Sulphur
Dinocap (33.2%, w/w)	Karathane	Dinitrophenol
Tolylfluanid (50.5%)	Elvaron Multi	Sulphamide
Fenhexamid (50%)	Teldor	Analide

1.3 Fungicides and Other Agents

- **Dithiocarbamates (e.g., Maneb, Zineb, Mancozeb):** Broad-spectrum fungicides that degrade into ethylenethiourea (ETU), a compound demonstrated to induce thyroid carcinomas and hepatic tumors in laboratory animal models.

Section 2: Toxicology and Carcinogenic Mechanisms

Carcinogenesis induced by agrochemicals involves multiple stage-specific biological alterations: tumor initiation, promotion, and progression.

2.1 Genotoxicity and DNA Mutagenesis

Agrochemicals induce structural chromatin alterations via both direct alkylation and indirect metabolic conversion:

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1. **Adduct Formation:** Electrophilic metabolites bind covalently to nucleophilic bases in DNA (e.g., forming $N7$-alkylguanine adducts), causing replication fork arrest and point mutations during repair synthesis.

2. **Chromosomal Aberrations:** Exposure triggers double-strand breaks (DSBs), sister chromatid exchanges (SCE), and micronucleus formation in peripheral blood lymphocytes—established biomarkers of elevated cancer risk.

2.2 Oxidative Stress and Mitochondrial Dysfunction

Pesticides elevate intracellular Reactive Oxygen Species (ROS)—including superoxide anions ($O_2^{\cdot -}$), hydrogen peroxide (H_2O_2), and hydroxyl radicals ($OH^{\cdot}$). Unchecked ROS induce lipid peroxidation of cell membranes and oxidation of DNA bases, primarily yielding 8-hydroxy-2'-deoxyguanosine (8-OHdG), a primary driver of transversions during cell division.

2.3 Endocrine Disruption (EDC Pathways)

Compounds such as Atrazine, Organochlorines, and Pyrethroids interact with nuclear hormone receptors:

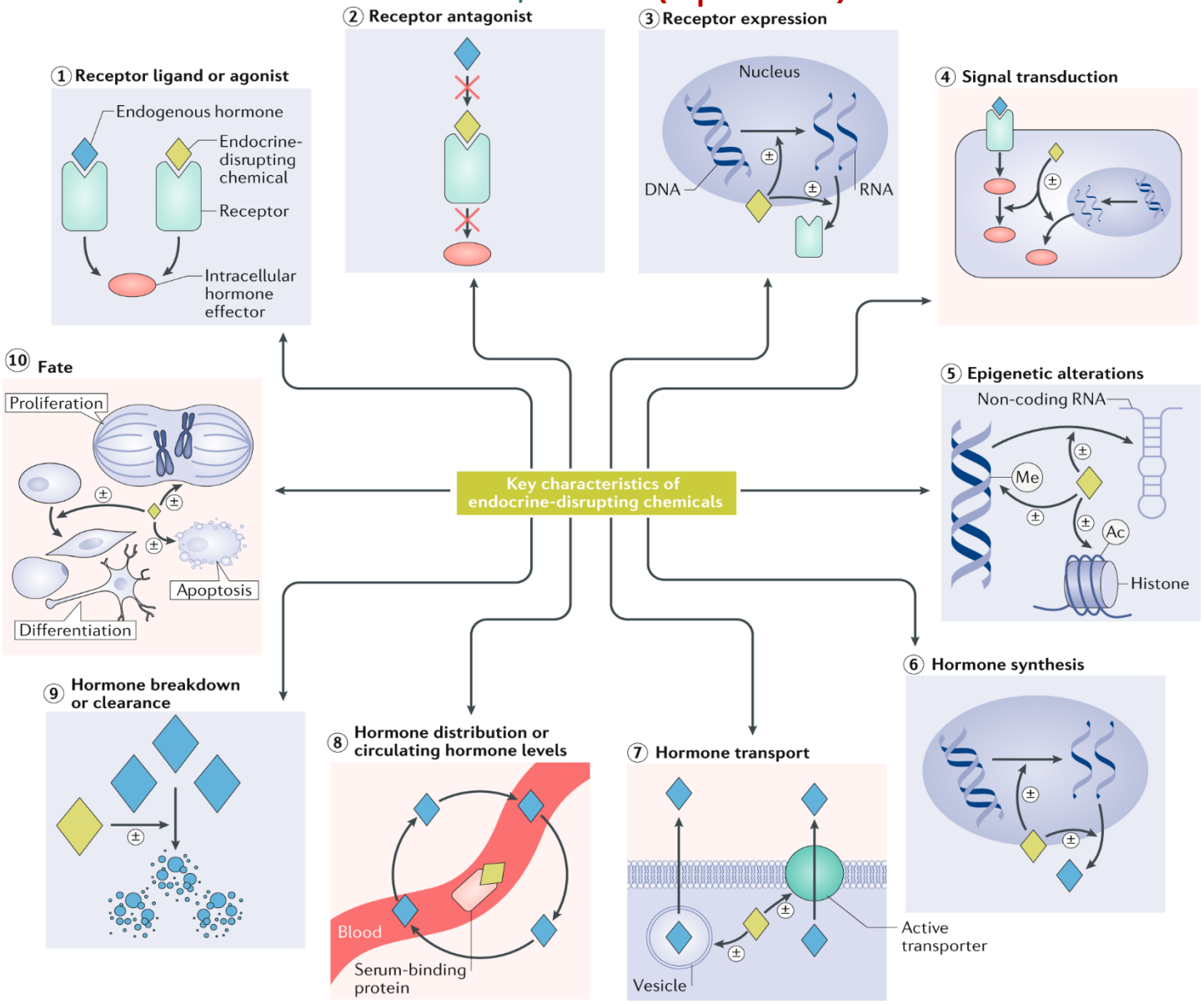
- **Estrogen Receptor ($ER\alpha/ER\beta$) Activation:** Mimicking endogenous 17β-estradiol promotes proliferation of hormone-dependent breast, endometrial, and ovarian cell lines.

- **Androgen Receptor (AR) Antagonism:** Inhibiting endogenous androgen binding induces physiological signaling changes associated with prostate lesions and reproductive dysfunction.

- **Aromatase Induction:** Up-regulating CYP19A1 gene expression accelerates peripheral conversion of androgens to estrogens.

2.4 Epigenetic Dysregulation

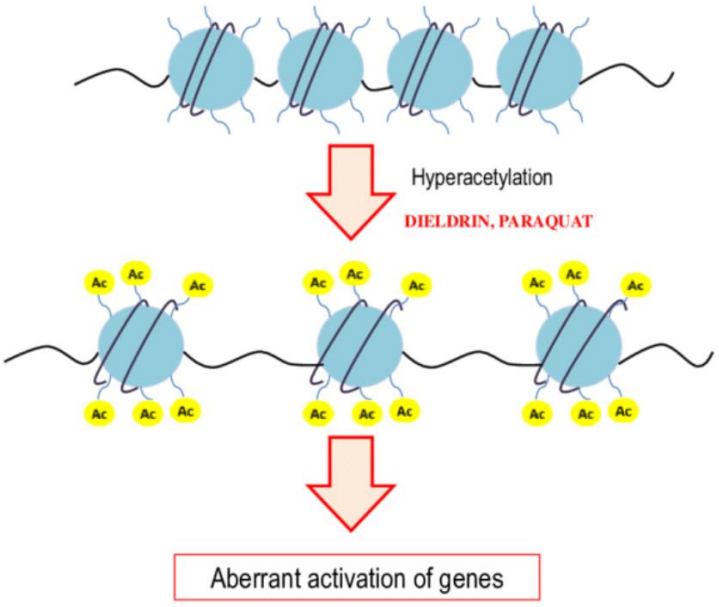
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Chronic low-dose agrochemical exposure induces heritable modifications to gene expression without altering primary DNA sequence:

- **Global DNA Hypomethylation:** Promotes genomic instability and activates proto-oncogenes.
- **Hypermethylation of Tumor Suppressor Genes:** Silences promoter regions of key checkpoint genes such as $p16^{INK4a}$, $p53$, and $BRCA1$.
- **Histone Code Alterations:** Perturbs histone acetylation and methylation patterns, modifying chromatin accessibility to transcription factors.

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Section 3: Routes of Exposure and Human Pharmacokinetics

3.1 Occupational Exposure

- **Dermal Absorption:** Primary exposure route for mixing, loading, and spraying personnel. Skin permeability varies by body site, with the scrotum, forehead, and hands exhibiting high systemic absorption rates.
- **Inhalation:** Inhalation of fine aerosol mists (PM_{10} and $PM_{2.5}$) allows direct pulmonary absorption into bronchial capillaries, bypassing hepatic first-pass metabolism.

3.2 Environmental and Bystander Exposure

- **Off-Target Drift:** Aerial and ground applications disperse active ingredients kilometers beyond targeted boundaries, creating persistent exposure zones for rural residents.
- **Groundwater and Surface Water Contamination:** Soluble compounds (e.g., Nitrate fertilizers, Atrazine, Metolachlor) leach through soil columns into aquifers, resisting degradation in anaerobic subterranean environments.

3.3 Consumer Exposure via Diet

Systemic pesticides absorbed by plants accumulate within edible plant tissues, resisting removal by surface washing. Low-dose daily ingestion yields chronic systemic exposure across urban populations.

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Section 4: Site-Specific Cancer Etiology and Clinical Findings

Epidemiological evaluations—including cohorts from the Agricultural Health Study (AHS)—demonstrate statistical associations between chemical exposure and specific cancer subtypes.

Cancer Subtype	Associated Agrochemical Classes / Agents	Relative Risk / Hazard Ratio Key Observations
Non-Hodgkin Lymphoma (NHL)	Glyphosate, Malathion, Diazinon, Lindane	Strong link to diffuse large B-cell lymphoma (DLBCL) and follicular lymphoma due to chromosomal translocations $t(14;18)$.
Leukemia (Acute & Chronic)	Chlorpyrifos, Permethrin, Benzene derivatives	Higher incidence in pediatric cohorts living near active farming districts (parental exposure connection).
Prostate Cancer	Fonofos, Phorate, Chlorpyrifos, Terbufos	Elevated risk among applicators with family history; synergistic effect with underlying biological vulnerability.
Multiple Myeloma	Permethrin, Dieldrin, Carbaryl	Elevated monoclonal gammopathy of undetermined significance (MGUS)—a premalignant precursor—in exposed applicators.
Thyroid Carcinoma	Mancozeb, Maneb, Ethylenethiourea (ETU)	Thyroid hormone receptor inhibition leading to chronic

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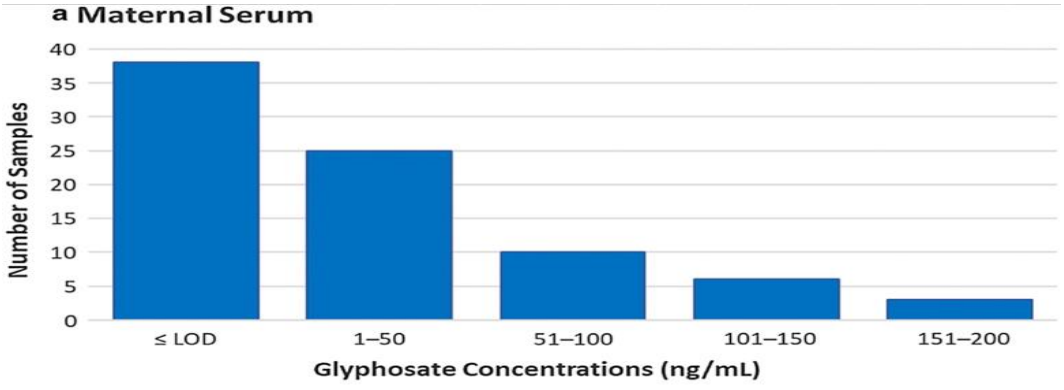
Cancer Subtype	Associated Agrochemical Classes / Agents	Relative Risk / Hazard Ratio Key Observations
		TSH stimulation and follicular hypertrophy/neoplasia.

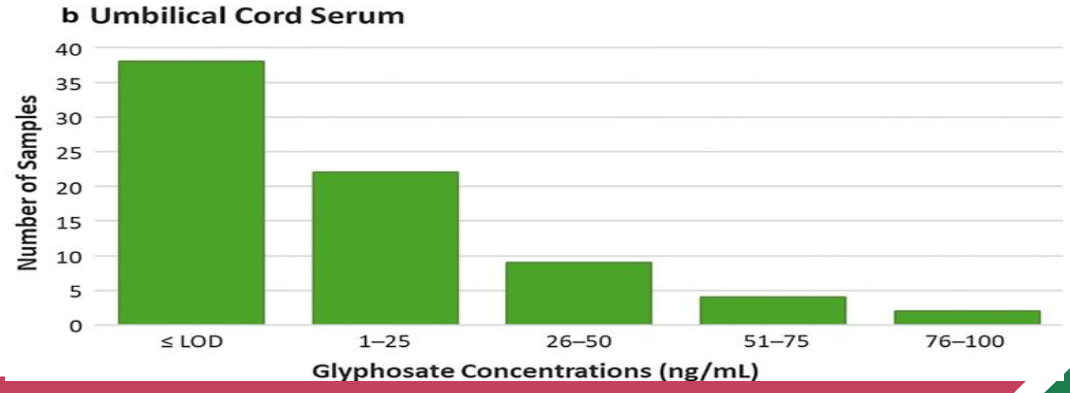
Section 5: Regulatory Frameworks and Methodological Challenges

5.1 Regulatory Gaps and IARC vs. EPA Discordance

Significant discrepancies exist between independent scientific reviews and regulatory approvals:

- **Classification Conflict:** In 2015, IARC designated Glyphosate as Group 2A ("Probably Carcinogenic to Humans"), citing mechanistically sound evidence of genotoxicity and oxidative stress. Conversely, the US EPA and EFSA evaluated industrial dossier data and maintained non-carcinogenic classifications.
- **Chemical-by-Chemical Assessment:** Current risk assessment frameworks test compounds individually. However, real-world exposure involves complex agrochemical mixtures, where synergistic toxicity can exceed predicted additive effects.





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5.2 Epidemiological Research Barriers

Identifying causal links between agrochemical exposure and carcinogenesis presents distinct methodological challenges:

- **Exposure Misclassification:** Reliance on recall surveys introduces recall bias; historical exposure records are often incomplete.
- **Latency Periods:** Malignancies typically manifest 15–40 years post-exposure, obscuring the link to specific chemical compounds applied decades earlier.
- **Confounding Variables:** Occupational co-exposures (e.g., engine exhaust, ultraviolet radiation, zoonotic viruses, silica dust) complicate single-agent attribution.

Section 6: Policy Intervention and Sustainable Alternatives

Addressing agrochemical health risks requires structural transitions in agricultural management, legislative reform, and public health policy.

6.1 Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and Agroecology

- **Biological Control:** Utilizing natural predators, parasites, and pathogens (e.g., *Bacillus thuringiensis*) to control pest populations naturally.
- **Crop Diversity:** Implementation of complex crop rotations, intercropping, and cover cropping to break pest life cycles without synthetic inputs.
- **Biopesticides:** Transitioning to plant-derived botanical extractives (e.g., Azadirachtin) and microbials that exhibit low environmental persistence and reduced mammalian toxicity.

6.2 Structural Policy Recommendations

1. **Mandated Mixture Toxicity Testing:** Regulatory bodies must require environmental impact assessments that evaluate cumulative toxicity from simultaneous multi-chemical exposures.
2. **Buffer Zone Regulations:** Expanding mandatory non-spray buffer margins around schools, residential developments, and vulnerable aquatic ecosystems.
3. **Occupational Protections:** Universalizing health monitoring protocols, mandatory PPE access, and continuous education programs for farm laborers across developing and developed nations alike.

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1. Advanced Molecular Pathways and Synergistic Toxicity

While individual chemical exposure profiles provide baseline risk assessments, real-world agricultural exposures involve complex mixtures. Understanding the chemical dynamics between distinct compounds reveals accelerated oncogenic pathways.

1.1 Synergistic Toxicity Dynamics

- **Cytochrome P450 Phase I Crosstalk:** Certain fungicides (e.g., triazoles) induce hepatic $CYP1A2$ and $CYP3A4$ enzymes. When co-administered with organophosphate insecticides, accelerated bioactivation converts parent compounds into toxic oxon intermediates faster than endogenous Phase II detoxifying enzymes (GST, UDP-glucuronosyltransferases) can neutralize them.
- **Efflux Pump Inhibition:** Persistent organic pollutants and surfactants in herbicide formulations alter cell membrane permeability by inhibiting P-glycoprotein ($MDR1$) transporters. This blocks multidrug resistance mechanisms, increasing intracellular accumulation of genotoxic compounds.
- **Metabolic Interactions:**
    1. **Potentiation:** Non-toxic adjuvants amplify the cellular uptake of active ingredients.
    2. **Additive Genotoxicity:** Simultaneous exposure to alkylating carbamates and ROS-generating herbicides produces cumulative strand breaks that overwhelm base excision repair (BER) systems.

2. Advanced Diagnostic Biomarkers

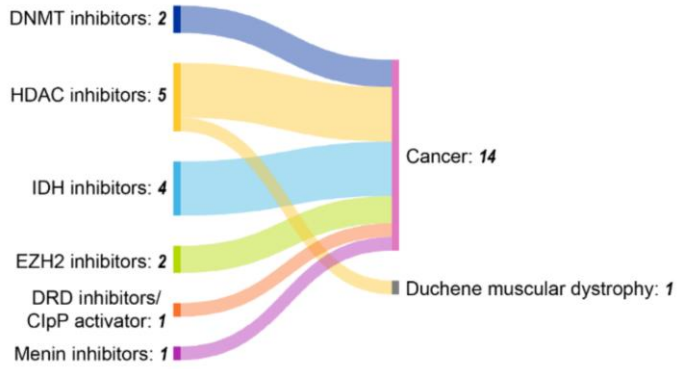
Early identification of chronic agrochemical toxicity relies on specific molecular and physiological biomarkers before clinical tumor manifestation.

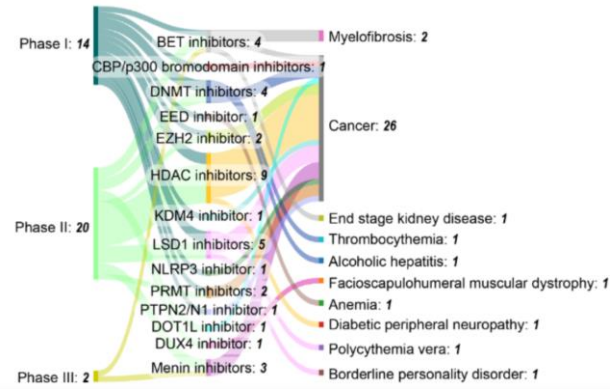
2.1 Genomic and Epigenetic Indicators

- $8-OHdG$ **(8-hydroxy-2'-deoxyguanosine):** Elevated urinary excretion levels reflect systemic oxidative DNA damage.
- **Micronucleus Frequency:** Quantified in buccal mucosa or peripheral blood lymphocytes, serving as an indicator of chromosome breakage or loss.

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- **Telomere Attrition Rates:** Accelerated shortening of leukocyte telomeres observed in long-term applicators, signaling premature cellular senescence and genomic instability.
- **DNA Methylation Profiles:** Specific hypermethylation patterns in promoter regions of $p53$ and $p16^{INK4a}$ genes detectable in blood plasma DNA fragments.





3. Vulnerable Populations and Developmental Susceptibility

3.1 Transplacental and Early Life Vulnerabilities

Fetal and pediatric populations exhibit heightened susceptibility to agrochemical toxicity due to developmental physiology:

1. **Immature Detoxification Pathways:** Lower hepatic expression of Paraoxonase-1 ($PON1$) in neonates reduces the rate of organophosphate hydrolysis.
2. **Placental Transfer:** Lipophilic organochlorines cross the placental barrier, exposing developing embryonic tissues during critical organogenesis windows.
3. **Blood-Brain Barrier Permeability:** Increased permeability in early childhood allows neurotoxic and genotoxic compounds greater access to central nervous system tissue.

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4. Modern Agricultural Precision & Alternatives

Transitioning away from broad-spectrum, high-volume chemical applications involves adopting targeted technology alongside biological management strategies.

4.1 Precision Agriculture and Technological Interventions

- **Targeted Spot-Spraying:** Computer-vision-guided sprayers utilize real-time image recognition to apply micro-doses directly to targeted weeds or pests, reducing overall chemical volume by up to 80%.
- **Drift-Reduction Technologies (DRT):** Air-assisted boom sprayers and specialized drift-reducing nozzles minimize aerosol drift into adjacent ecosystems.
- **Biopesticides and Microbials:** Utilization of natural enemies, entomopathogenic fungi (*Metarhizium anisopliae*), and botanical extracts offers targeted pest management with rapid environmental degradation and minimal human cell toxicity.

5. Comprehensive Policy and Legislative Roadmap

To mitigate public health risks associated with agricultural chemical exposure, regulatory bodies must update policy guidelines:

1. **Mandate Cumulative Exposure Risk Assessments:** Shift from single-chemical evaluations to testing combined real-world exposure mixtures.
2. **Implement Real-Time Worker Monitoring:** Enforce mandatory biological monitoring ($PON1$ activity, urinary $8-OHdG$) for all commercial chemical applicators.
3. **Restrict Known Endocrine Disruptors:** Establish systematic phase-outs for active ingredients meeting IARC Group 1 or 2A classifications.
4. **Expand Community Buffer Zones:** Establish enforceable minimum non-spray boundaries around rural residential zones, public schools, and surface water aquifers.

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