

Pesticide use and misuse by small scale farmers in Kiambu, Kenya

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This study was set to investigate the use of pesticides by small-scale farmers and its implications on the environment. It further sought to find out whether illiteracy causes misuse of pesticides and if provision of information on pesticides reduces their misuse and mishandling. Three divisions in Kiambu district were selected using the cluster sample technique for interviews. The interview schedules contained questions aimed at answering the specific research questions. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics i.e. frequencies, averages and percentages. In some cases, the responses were reported verbatim. The validity of this study relied on the assumption that the interviews were reasonably honest and expressed their true feelings when responding to the interviewer's questions. It was established that some small-scale farmers used a wide range of extremely hazardous pesticides, which were either banned or severely restricted for use in developed countries. These included Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT), dieldrin, heptachlor, cypermethrin and lindane. Factors such as the economic status of the farmers and the prevailing climatic conditions were found to contribute to pesticide misuse and mishandling than illiteracy. In view of the problems of pesticide use, it was recommended that measures be taken to enforce pesticide regulations and legislation. The introduction of laws and regulations concerning disposal of unused pesticides and their containers should be supported while improved methods of packaging would reduce hazards arising from pesticide use. Further, labelling and advertising of pesticides should be monitored. Environmental education should incorporate pesticide safety education in the whole education system to sensitise and increase public awareness on the risks and potential problems of pesticide use and handling.