Pesticide reduction is critical to achieving Canada's biodiversity goals

Canada is the fifth largest pesticide user in the world. In the last ten years, pesticide sales have increased by 30 per cent, and we use three times more agricultural pesticides per hectare of cropland than our European counterparts.

Not only does excessive pesticide use cost farmers financially, but pest resistance, beneficial insect harms and other impacts contribute to biodiversity, climate and human health damages. Canada has banned just 32 of the 531 pesticides that are currently banned in other countries. Pesticide exposures for farmers, workers and children are linked to diseases, neurodevelopmental disorders, and cancers such as lymphoma and leukemia.

Canada's international commitments need a roadmap. ECCC negotiators led the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and its post-2020 Framework, and now must develop a national implementation strategy to reduce pesticides by at least half by 2030 (Target 7). At the G7 Ministers Meeting on Climate Energy and Environment, the Minister committed to promoting organic farming and agroecology, and addressing biodiversity and health harms, from endocrine-disrupting chemicals which are common in pesticides.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Adapt existing reduction models. Other jurisdictions are moving quickly. For example, the EU's Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive (SUD) and Farm to Fork Strategy offer a model and an evidence-based approach for achieving a 50% pesticide reduction by 2030.

Pesticide reductions can achieve endangered species wins. While Agriculture and Agri-food Canada, Health Canada, and the Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) all play important roles in achieving pesticides reduction, there are serious gaps in the Sustainable Agriculture Strategy and PMRA "modernization". There is a need for ECCC's leadership to align federal pesticide regulation with Canada's commitment to halting and reversing biodiversity harms and nature loss.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Use species protection tools to develop stronger pesticide restrictions. Pesticide reductions can help address the biodiversity crisis. The benefits of pesticide reductions on threatened pollinators and monarchs are well-documented, and one of the few successful species recovery stories arises from a pesticide ban (peregrine falcon and bald eagle and DDT).

Corporate influence must be addressed head-on. There is ever-increasing corporate control of all aspects of our food systems, from seeds to insurance, inputs, knowledge, and regulation. The companies, lobbyists and consultants who drive permissive pesticides decisions, weak regulatory enforcement and accountability, and conflict-laden consultation processes will not allow for a meaningful pesticides transformation mandate.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Put the public interest first. This file requires independent expertise to push Pest Control Products Act (PCPA) reform and PMRA modernization. It also requires public investments in independent tools, supports and agrologists to better manage pesticide use.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Reserve pesticides for their needed use. Quebec offers a model of agronomist prescription-based pesticide applications to reduce prophylactic, indiscriminate spraying in various sectors. This, in addition to certification of pesticide applicators and public-sector crop and forest advisors who can support healthy plants, soils and nature-based pest management, could offer a pesticides reduction roadmap to achieve our 2030 goals.