

Standing Committee Report Summary

Insecticides and Pesticides – Promotion and Development

- The Standing Committee on Chemicals and Fertilizers (Chair: Dr. Shashi Tharoor) presented its report on ‘Insecticides and Pesticides – Promotion and Development including Safe Usage – Licensing Regime for Insecticides’ on December 19, 2023. Pesticides are broadly of four types: insecticides, fungicides, herbicides, and bio-pesticides. Herbicides kill/control the growth of weeds, and have the largest market share at 44%, followed by fungicides (27%) and insecticides (22%). Key observations and recommendations of the Committee include:
 - **Appropriate body to administer the law:** Pesticides are regulated under the Insecticides Act, 1968. The Act is administered by the Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, and is kept outside the purview of the Department of Chemicals and Petrochemicals. The Committee noted that the Chemicals Department plays a significant role in regulating pesticides since it is responsible for taking up matters of the agrochemicals industry from time to time. The Committee recommended that the Chemicals Department take the matter to the appropriate forum to at least administer those provisions that are related to agrochemicals. Pesticides are broadly termed as agrochemicals.
 - **Coordination between different Departments:** The Agriculture Department is responsible to review the use and prohibition of harmful pesticides. So far, it has banned or phased out 46 pesticides. The Chemicals Department is responsible to promote agrochemicals. The Committee noted that both the Departments need to closely coordinate to avoid instances where one department promotes the use, and the other bans it.
 - **Balancing overuse of pesticides:** The Committee noted the importance of pesticides in preventing agricultural loss. For instance, pesticides were used to control the 2019-20 and 2020-21 locust attacks. During this period, an increase in the production of foodgrain was also observed. While the Department has taken measures to promote the use of pesticides, the Committee noted that their extensive use can be harmful. It can pollute the air, water, soil, and the overall ecosystem which can cause serious health hazards. The Committee recommended that pesticide promotion measures be implemented stringently to ensure their balanced growth.
 - **Encouraging use of pesticides:** Pesticide consumption in India is 0.5 kg per hectare, compared to other countries where it is as high as 17 kg per hectare. This
- is despite India being the second largest producer of agricultural products. The Committee noted that this suggests that the market for pesticides is largely unpenetrated in India. With rising food demand, pesticides will play a key role in increasing the average crop yield per hectare. The Committee suggested that the Department study the agricultural practices in Japan and China, and take initiatives to boost the industry. The Department noted that pesticide usage of countries like China and Japan is due to their agricultural practices being more intensive.
- **Declining use of DDT:** DDT is a chemical pesticide, whose use is banned in several countries. The Stockholm Convention has mandated the elimination of DDT from India by December 2024. This convention has been ratified by India. Currently, HIL India Limited is the sole manufacturer of DDT, and supplies it to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. The United Nations Industrial Development Organization is supporting HIL in phasing out DDT. It is providing support in setting up commercial manufacturing units for alternates to DDT such as long-lasting insecticidal nets, neem-based botanical insecticides, and repellents.
- **Advisory Forum for the agrochemicals industry:** In July 2019, the Department of Chemicals and Fertilizers had constituted an Advisory Committee to: (i) identify issues that hinder the growth and development of the agrochemicals industry, and (ii) boost the Make in India initiative by promoting investments. The Forum provides a platform for industry associations to raise their grievances. The Committee noted that the Forum is meeting only once a year. It recommended that the frequency of meetings should be increased to identify growth impediments and find solutions.
- **Indian chemicals industry:** India’s chemical industry is currently at the sixth position globally in sales, with a market size of USD 220 billion. The Indian agrochemicals industry is the 4th largest global producer and exporter. Despite that, the chemicals industry was a net importer in 2020-21, with the trade deficit at Rs 1.8 lakh crore. The Committee observed that the primary reason for this is the non-availability of feedstocks and mining agents. The Department is working on introducing a Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme in the chemicals sector to reduce import dependence. The Committee recommended that the government work to urgently reduce the trade deficit.

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