

Ban weedicide - Fiji Times Online

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LAUTOKA-based Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprises and Development (FRIEND) has called on the Ministry of Agriculture to ban the use of a pesticide which could be harmful to farmers and consumers.

FRIEND director Sashi Kiran said the weedicide known as "Round Up" is widely used by farmers in Fiji to control weeds in their farms.

"Glyphosate, the chief ingredient in Round Up weedkiller, which is sprayed over acres of crops, has been found in food and has been linked to a range of health problems and diseases, including Parkinson's, infertility and cancers," she said.

"Over the years, a lot of controversy has surrounded the weedkiller and various studies have been released.

"Food safety is each one's responsibility, including that of our farmers as we mark the World Health Day today (yesterday) and it is important that farmers and consumers are aware of the inputs in our food chain.

"Farmers in Fiji are not aware of the negative effects of this chemical and are often seen spraying without the use of protective gear."

She said families were exposed to the chemical as a norm while children walking from school pass by acres of sprayed fields inhaled the compound.

"Due to ignorance and poor handling, these chemicals pose great danger to health."

Senior agricultural officer West, Vinesh Kumar, said the Health Ministry had a strict policy about chemicals being used on farms.

"We have our chemical protection unit that screens all chemicals, including weedicides before they are introduced into the market," Mr Kumar said.

"Round Up is a chemical that has a withholding period and they are applied systematically so if a farmer applies it in large dosages or not according to the way it should be used, it will make its way into food.

"But if there are concerns about this chemical, the ministry is willing to look into it," he said.