

## Danger in the fields

Posted by Joan Russow  
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Dario Aranda

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English translation of the Spanish original by Google/GMWatch

A report by the Ministry of Health in Cordoba on deaths from cancerous tumours shows that the highest rate of deaths occur in areas where GM crops and agro-chemicals are used. The rate is double the national average.

The Ministry of Health of Córdoba released a comprehensive report on cancer in the province. It documented five years of information and, among other parameters, geographically determined the cases. The peculiarity which caused a major alarm is that the highest rate of deaths occurs in the "pampa gringa" area, where most transgenic and agrochemicals are used. And where the death rate is double the national average. "Once again, what we have complained about for years was confirmed and especially what doctors say about the sprayed towns and areas affected by industrial agriculture. Cancer cases are multiplying as never before in areas with massive use of pesticides," said the doctor and member of the University Network for Environment and Health (Reduas), Medardo Avila Vazquez. They demanded immediate measures to protect the population.

The official investigation in book form is entitled "Report on cancer in Cordoba 2004-2009", and was prepared by the Provincial Tumour Registry and the Department of Statistics and Census. It was introduced in the Legislature by the Minister of Health, Francisco Fortuna, and the director of the Provincial Cancer Institute, Martín Alonso.

The international standard is to calculate deaths per 100 thousand inhabitants. The provincial average is 158 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants, and in Cordoba Capital the rate is 134.8. But four Cordoba departments are well above those rates: Marcos Juárez (229.8), Presidente Roque Sáenz Peña (228.4), Union (217.4) and San Justo (216.8). It's called "pampa gringa", the emblematic area of Cordoba agriculture.

According to the International Agency for Research on Cancer (of the World Health Organization), in its latest 2012 data for Argentina, mortality is 115.13, half of what is suffered in

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Marcos Juárez (229.8).

Fernando Manas holds a PhD in Biology and is a member of the Genetics and Environmental Mutagenesis Group, National University of Río Cuarto, which is investigating the effect of agrochemicals. He doesn't think the cancer cases in agricultural areas are a coincidence: "There is evidence of high levels of genetic damage in people of Marcos Juárez, which may result from unintentional exposure to pesticides."

Researchers at Río Cuarto have studied the people of Córdoba for eight years and have confirmed, in fifteen scientific publications, that those exposed to pesticides suffer genetic damage and are more prone to cancer. Manas recalled that in Marcos Juárez province, glyphosate (and its major degradation product, AMPA) have been detected in lakes, soils, and even in rainwater.

The Córdoba government's investigation arranged the cancer map according to groupings for the level of deaths. The "pampa gringa" (the whole of the east of the province) is located in the first segment. The second level corresponds to the departments of Río Cuarto, General San Martín, Celman, Tercero Arriba and General Roca. The deaths range from 180-201 per 100 thousand inhabitants, rates that exceed the provincial and national average. This second level also has the distinction of being dedicated to industrial farming.

The provincial government emphasized the overall statistics of incidence (new cases) and compared them with other countries (the province remains at the average rate), stratified by age and sex, and locations of tumours. It de-emphasised the link between high mortality and agricultural areas. In Córdoba there is much debate over the Monsanto facility in the town of Malvinas Argentinas.

Damian Verzeñassi is a doctor and professor of social and environmental health at the, Faculty of Medical Sciences in Rosario. He is one of those responsible for the "Health Camp", an educational initiative in which dozens of students in the final year of their medical training are installed in a location for a week and made a health map. "The study of Córdoba matches the surveys we conducted in eighteen industrial agriculture areas. Cancer has skyrocketed in the last fifteen years," said Verzeñassi.

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The university professor questioned the claims of government and industry. "They keep demanding studies on something that is already proven and do not take urgent measures to protect the population. There is ample evidence that the agricultural model has health consequences, we are talking about a production model that is a huge public health problem," he claimed.

Avila Vázquez of the University Network for Environment and Health detailed a dozen scientific studies that prove the link between chemicals and cancer, and also listed some thirty villages where official records confirm the increase of the disease: Brinkmann, Noetinger, Hernando (Córdoba) and San Salvador (Entre Rios), among others. "The tobacco companies denied the link between smoking and cancer, and took decades to recognize the truth. The biotech and agrochemical corporations are the same as the tobacco industry, they lie and favour business over the health of the population," Avila Vasquez said. He demanded urgent initial measures: prohibiting aerial spraying, ensuring that no terrestrial applications are made within 1000 meters of houses, and prohibiting depositories of agro-chemicals and spraying machinery in urban areas.