

Corteva to stop making pesticide linked to kids' health problems

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CHICAGO (Reuters) - Corteva Inc will stop producing the agricultural pesticide chlorpyrifos by the end of the year, the company said on Thursday, removing the world's largest manufacturer of a chemical that has been linked to low birth weight, reduced IQ and attention disorders in children.

Corteva, spun off last year after a merger of Dow Chemical and Dupont, said declining sales drove its decision to end production and officials continue to believe chlorpyrifos is safe.

The company's move reflects a shift toward newer products in the \$14.5 billion global agrichemicals industry amid increased regulatory restrictions on chlorpyrifos, which is applied to crops from corn to cauliflower. Environmental groups have pushed regulators to ban uses of the 55-year-old pesticide over concerns it harms people and wildlife.

"We've made the difficult decision to stop our manufacturing of chlorpyrifos," Susanne Wasson, president of Corteva's crop protection business, told Reuters.

In the U.S., Corteva's biggest market for chlorpyrifos, demand is less than 20% of what it was during its peak in the 1990s, the company said. Industry sales were \$350 million in 2005, down 45% from 1990, according to Corteva.

By volume, estimated use dropped to under 5 million pounds in 2016 from about 13 million pounds in 1994, U.S. Geological Survey data show.

Corteva, which sells chlorpyrifos under the Lorsban brand, faces competition from generic versions. Farmers seeking to fight insects have also turned to other chemicals, genetically engineered crops and seeds coated with pesticides.

Demand for chlorpyrifos is expected to drop further amid regulatory restrictions, including an EU decision to ban uses of the pesticide, Corteva said.

On Thursday, manufacturers must stop sales in California under an agreement with the state, which says chlorpyrifos is harmful. California farmers cannot possess or use chlorpyrifos products after Dec. 31.

“Children and farm workers in California will no longer be exposed to this neurotoxic pesticide that can permanently impair the brain and nervous systems,” said Ken Cook, president of Environmental Working Group, an activist organization.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency reversed a ban on chlorpyrifos use on farms under President Donald Trump, saying there was not enough evidence to link it to children’s health problems.

Corteva said it will continue to support chlorpyrifos in an EPA review.

“We believe in the product,” Wasson said.

Corteva previously agreed to sell chlorpyrifos assets in India and has assessed its portfolio to ensure it is the best owner of businesses. Sales in its crop protection unit dropped 3% to \$6.26 billion in fiscal year 2019.

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