



November 28, 2022

Deputy Director Beth Bechdol
UN Food and Agriculture Organization
Viale delle Terme di Caracalla
00153 Rome, Italy

Dear Deputy Director Bechdol,

On behalf of Pesticide Action Network International and the undersigned civil society and Indigenous Peoples organizations, we once again thank you for your time in meeting with our representatives to discuss concerns regarding FAO's agreement with CropLife International (CLI). We appreciated the opportunity to dialogue and [strongly register our demand to end](#) the FAO's intent to collaborate with the world's biggest pesticide corporations, as expressed by nearly [200,000 individuals from over 107 countries](#), over [430 civil society and Indigenous Peoples organizations](#), nearly 300 [academics and scientists](#), and nearly 50 [philanthropic groups](#), as well as the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food who [raised concerns in his report to the 49th session of the UN Human Rights Council](#).

As you gather for the FAO Council 171st Session, we reiterate our call for greater transparency and accountability regarding the FAO's ongoing and deepening collaboration with CLI and its members, and urge you to rescind the Letter of Intent (LOI) signed in 2020.

The pesticide industry, responsible for 385 million pesticide poisonings per year and unprecedented levels of pollution and biodiversity loss, is a huge contributor to the global food, ecological and climate crises. CropLife is no ordinary private sector actor; its primary aim to sell toxic pesticides runs directly counter to FAO's mandate and the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. CropLife uses the guise of agricultural innovation and digital technology to expand market opportunities and increase profits for its members, [especially in the Global South](#) where highly hazardous pesticide (HHP) sales are even higher and have more impacts on health and environment. CropLife member companies [have interfered in scientific data and national policy](#). It cannot be ignored that CLI has outsized political and economic influence on efforts to ban or restrict the world's most toxic pesticides or regulate global export and distribution.

The FAO must EXCLUDE CropLife in private sector partnerships mentioned as an integral part of its strategies to address the food and climate crises, particularly the FAO's [Strategy on Climate Change](#) and [Science and Innovation Strategy](#).

While we continue to closely follow the developments in UN Women, **we call on FAO to follow the [example provided by UN Women](#), which ended its Memorandum Of Understanding with investment firm BlackRock after listening to civil society concerns**. This demonstrates that it is possible for a UN institution with obligations to fulfill human rights to recognize and respond when there is conflict of interest and incongruence with the mandate.

The global response to the climate crisis requires a phaseout of the fossil-fuel based food system and use of agrochemicals, which contribute significantly to greenhouse gas emissions and ecological collapse. FAO has an opportunity to demonstrate bold leadership on climate action by delivering a much more concerted effort to reduce reliance on chemical pesticides. However, the [Food and Agriculture Pavilion](#) co-organised by the FAO, CGIAR and the Rockefeller Foundation during the COP27 prioritized “climate-smart,” digital technologies and marketplace-centered innovations that CLI member companies Bayer, BASF, Corteva, FMC and Syngenta seek to advance. This, combined with the [white paper](#) released jointly by the FAO and World Economic Forum on “transforming food systems” through innovations, and the priorities in the FAO’s new [Science and Innovation Strategy](#) illustrate the widening of space and influence of the pesticide industry. **We call on FAO to prioritize people-led agroecology as an innovative climate resilience solution, and ensure that the climate and science strategies do not give precedence to pesticide and fertilizer products nor private sector entities affiliated with human rights violations or environmental destruction.**

We recognize and support the FAO’s efforts to increase the pesticide industry’s contribution to cleaning up its own hazardous waste. However, such efforts do not require an official LOI with CropLife. As we have elaborated in previous appeals, collaborating with the pesticide industry on broader areas of work [outlined in the LOI, as well as in the areas of “digitalization” and “agri-food systems transformation.”](#) goes against the FAO’s own Code of Conduct on Pesticide Management, its [Guidance to reduce reliance on pesticides](#), and [Guideline recommendations to phase out and end the use of HHPs](#). The LOI with CLI signals that the FAO is undercutting its [support for alternatives such as agroecology](#) to generate ecologically-based agrifood systems without the use of toxic pesticides.

You clarified in our meeting that CropLife has not made any financial contributions to FAO since 2011. However, private sector investments to Member States are actively being facilitated through the FAO’s Hand-In-Hand Initiative – in effect encouraging pesticide companies to invest in low and middle income countries. The Director General appealed to CropLife for such in his [speech to the CLI Board of Directors](#) the same day as the LOI was signed. **The FAO should not invite or facilitate CropLife and its members to such HiH investment opportunities, and should exclude them from public-private “innovative funding and financing” partnerships referenced in the FAO Strategy on Climate Change. The FAO must uphold public transparency in all of its activities with CropLife and its member companies.**

A topic of discussion in this Council session is “Participation of private sector observers in sessions of FAO Governing Bodies” ([Item 16](#)). We strongly urge that CLI nor any of its member companies not be granted the undue privilege of such [permanent](#) observer status. This would only further the conflict of interest that exists between CLI and FAO, grant even greater privileges to the pesticide industry, and blur the areas of collaboration that already lack transparency. In our July meeting, you stated there is no current discussion on advancing the indefinite LOI agreement with CLI to a formal MOU. **It is crucial that the FAO not create other means, such as private sector observer status for representatives of the pesticide industry, to sit in on agency efforts.**

We once again reiterate the call from civil society and Indigenous peoples, farmers and agricultural workers, trade unions, scientists, academics, and other communities for the FAO to rescind its indefinite agreement with CLI and finally end its “intent” to collaborate with the biggest players in the pesticide industry. The 171st FAO Council Session is an opportune time to take such action.

Thank you for your attention. Sincerely,

Keith Tyrell, Chair
Pesticide Action Network International

Million Belay, Coordinator
Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA)

David Azoulay, Environmental Health Program Director
Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL)

Sofia Monsalve, Secretary General
FIAN International

Kirtana Chandrasekaran and Martín Drago, Food Sovereignty Program Coordinators
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Sophia Murphy, Executive Director
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Pam Miller and Tadesse Amera, Co-Chairs
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Laurent Gaberell and Carla Hoinkes, Agriculture and Food Experts
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