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Herbicide Used in Argentina Could Cause Birth Defects

BUENOS AIRES – The herbicide used on genetically modified soy – Argentina's main crop – could cause brain, intestinal and heart defects in fetuses, according to the results of a scientific investigation released Monday.

Although the study "used amphibian embryos," the results "are completely comparable to what would happen in the development of a human embryo," embryology professor Andres Carrasco, one of the study's authors, told Efe.

"The noteworthy thing is that there are no studies of embryos on the world level and none where glyphosate is injected into embryos," said the researcher with the National Council for Scientific and Technical Research and director of the Molecular Embryology Laboratory.

The doses of herbicide used in the study "were much lower than the levels used in the fumigations," and so the situation "is much more serious" that the study suggests because "glyphosate does not degrade," Carrasco warned.

In Argentina, farmers each year use between 180 and 200 million liters of glyphosate, which was developed by the multinational Monsanto and sold in the United States under the brand name Roundup.

Carrasco said that the research found that "pure glyphosate, in doses lower than those used in fumigation, causes defects ... (and) could be interfering in some normal embryonic development mechanism having to do with the way in which cells divide and die."

"The companies say that drinking a glass of glyphosate is healthier than drinking a glass of milk, but the fact is that they've used us as guinea pigs," he said.

He gave as an example what occurred in Ituzaingo, a district where 5,000 people live on the outskirts of the central Argentine city of Cordoba, where over the past eight years about 300 cases of cancer associated with fumigations with pesticides have turned up.

"In communities like Ituzaingo it's already too late, but we have to have a preventive system, to demand that the companies give us security frameworks and, above all, to have very strict regulations for fumigation, which nobody is adhering to out of ignorance or greed," he said.

The researcher also said that, apart from the research he carried out, "there has to be a serious study" on the effects of glyphosate on human beings, adding that "the state has all the mechanisms for that."

In the face of the volley of judicial complaints related to the disproportionate use of agrochemicals in the cultivation of GM soy, last February the Health Ministry created a group to investigate the problem in four Argentine provinces.

Argentina is the world's third-largest exporter of soy. EFE

