

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Agribusiness and pandemic in Brazil

Is a syndemic worsening the Covid-19 pandemic?



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Over 600 public interest NGOs in more than 124 countries, largely low- and middle-income nations, comprise IPEN and work to strengthen global and national chemicals and waste policies, contribute to ground-breaking research, and build a global movement for a toxics-free future.

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Abrasco aims to support and articulate Collective Health entities to strengthen associates and expand the dialogue with the technical-scientific community and with health services, governmental and non-governmental organizations and civil society. At the international level, Abrasco maintains a close dialogue with entities such as the World Federation of Public Health Associations (WFPHA), of which it has been associated since 2002, with the Latin American Association of Social Medicine and Collective Health (Alames) and others, such as the International Pollutants Elimination Network (IPEN).

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COVID-19 is a disease where both the necessary cause -the SarsCov-2 virus - and many of the contributing causes such as malnutrition and environmental exposures are related to activities of agribusiness. Many processes are driving the emergence of new zoonoses: increasing demand for animal protein, agricultural intensification, increased exploitation of wildlife and natural resources (accelerated by urbanization and extractive industries), increased travel and lengthening of food supply chains. In Brazil the health effects of the pandemic are exacerbated by: deep social inequalities, high and unequal burden of comorbidities, democratic fragility, and setbacks in social and environmental policies with exposure to contaminants such as pesticides. The effect of these factors is accentuated by the: 1) deregulation of sanitary, labor and environmental systems, expanding the possibilities of exposure to pesticides and malnutrition; 2) dismantling of health and environmental inspection structures; 3) continued dismantling of health services, including prevention and assistance; and 4) the longtime, increasing burden of chronic disorders, generating a syndemic interaction with COVID-19. This report will analyze the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil in the context of the 1) ongoing dismantling of institutions and legislation, 2) the influence of agribusiness on policy and 3) the dependence on the use of pesticides. A chronology and a brief analysis of the environmental and political changes that preceded the COVID-19 pandemic is presented. A more extensive analysis of the use of pesticides in Brazil and its consequences have also been done by others such as the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics - IBGE¹; Institute of Applied Economic Research - IPEA²; Brazilian Association of Public Health - ABRASCO; Oswaldo Cruz Foundation - Fiocruz; Permanent Campaign Against Pesticides and for Life³; National Forum Against the Impacts

of Pesticides and Transgenics⁴; Brazilian Association of Agroecology⁵. A large work has been done to develop an Atlas of the Use of Pesticides in Brazil and Connections with the European Union⁶. We describe the current Brazilian context and macroeconomic, commercial and political determination of health effects related to agribusiness. The pandemic has in 2020 taken more than 200.000 lives against backdrop of a policy of austerity and deregulation. A broad range of policies are rolling back social security and public participation, deregulating the farming industry, and promoting industrial food production and the increasing use of pesticides. We describe how these political, social and territorial vulnerabilities and toxic exposures are contributing drivers in the social determination of the pandemic. We have developed a model to illustrate the main pathways by which agrobusiness aggravates the COVID-19 pandemic into a syndemic, and show that the immunological defense against the virus is damaged by extensive exposure to pesticides and the rising prevalence of obesity driven by the industrial food production and marketing. The important conclusion here is that the many health effects from the intensive extractives and industrialized agribusiness through at least three different pathways might aggravate both exposure and vulnerability to zoonotic disorders like COVID-19. Ongoing changes in Brazilian policies in health, agriculture and environment shows that the situation may get worse. Surveillance bodies are closed or underfinanced and less money is channeled to family farming, organic and agroecological productions.

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