

Purpose of the SA People's Tribunal on Agrotoxins and the process leading up to it

- Make the system that causes human and environmental rights violations with regards to agrotoxins visible
- Bring policy and legislative changes
- Support and solidarity with current campaigns, including local and international campaigns on highly hazardous pesticides.
- Bring justice, dignity and protection for farmworkers and an end to victimisation and isolation.
- Use the process of preparing for the Tribunal as an opportunity for mobilisation, education and movementbuilding on agrotoxins, including workers, small scale farmers, fisher communities, consumers and broader civil society alliances.
- Advocate for a transition out of industrial agriculture through handing down a judgement that demands a radical and transformative agenda.
- Documentation to create a shared body of work on agrotoxins, gather case studies and identify research and policy gaps.

What is a People's Tribunal?

SAPToA will host the first South African People's Tribunal on AgroToxins in 2025. Peoples' Tribunals are a way for grassroots campaigns to gain justice. Peoples' Tribunals can play an important role in empowering victims, building political education and solidarity, recording victim's stories and exposing those who are committing human rights violations. It can also lead to demands to change relevant laws or to prosecute wrongdoers.

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The South African People's Tribunal on AgroToxins

(SAPToA) is a coalition of vulnerable and affected peoples, civil society organisations, trade unions, academics and individuals working together to expose the harmful reality of pesticides in South Africa and support those who work with agricultural toxins in their daily lives.



South Africa is the largest consumer of agrotoxins in Africa. Farmers and industry use many chemicals that are categorised as highly hazardous pesticides (HHPs), as well as chemicals that are banned in the European Union. There is a regulatory break-down in the country and a 'free-for-all' in the agro-chemical industry, leading to human rights violations and environmental calamity. This is nothing less than a war on nature and humans, threatening the very foundation of life. It occurs at the nexus of multiple crises in the late stage of capitalism, including the climate cost of pesticides and economic and social injustice.

South Africa's highly capitalised large-scale agriculture was shaped in the apartheid era through protectionist policies and subsidies, land dispossession, brutal oppression and cheap labour. The adoption of neoliberal agricultural policy in democratic South Africa values industrial agriculture as 'modern'. This method is based on a technological package of hybrid seed bred to perform when cultivated in monocrops, with the support of synthetic fertiliser and a wide variety agrotoxins that control weeds, pests, and diseases.

Farm worker's struggles ●●●

There are over 9,000 toxic chemical compounds registered for use in SA, in varying categories of toxicity. Farm workers are exposed to these daily. While men often do the spraying, women farmworkers are also vulnerable to pesticide exposure, which occurs in multiple ways, including when pesticides are applied while they are working without proper protective clothing and when they are forced to re-enter vineyards soon after pesticides have been sprayed.

Farm bosses often ignore regulations regarding training, access to information, protective gear, wash stations, etc., and no one is monitoring them. Local clinics lack knowledge of pesticides in use in their vicinity, how to diagnose and treat poisoning, or their obligations to report pesticide poisoning. Farm workers live under extremely vulnerable and precarious working conditions where they have little to no bargaining power.

They receive the barest minimum wage, with little access to health services. No amount of traceability and labelling will make a substance designed to kill safe, and there is no ideal real-life situation where these toxins can be deployed safely.

Farm workers and their children, farm dwellers, and people living adjacent to farms are also exposed to these toxins regularly. In spraying season those living on and adjacent to farms experience the familiar symptoms of exposure to cocktails of toxic pesticides drifting in the air – asthma, sinus, streaming eyes, mood swings, headaches – and many will know the long-term impacts in their bodies in years to come.

The injustices that farm workers face are made worse by their isolated living conditions in rural areas and on private property, where human rights violations can easily go "unseen, unreported and unpunished".

