Swedish Pesticide Policy in a Changing Environment

Olle Pettersson

Introduction

As in most industrial or postindustrial countries, Swedish agriculture during past decades, as well as today, is being subjected to major technological, environmental, economic, and social changes. The dominating trends in this development are fairly uniform; higher yields and more efficient production by utilization of better plant and animal varieties, together with technical and chemical aids.

Accompanying the changes in technology, intensity, and cultivation as well as in the industrial structure, agriculture and horticulture have been the subject of increased environment impact and the object of intensified environmental conflicts and discussion. The conflicts and controversies, as well as the political results, differ in time and character between countries due to sociological, ethical, and political differences.

In this respect, some specific Swedish (or maybe Scandinavian) characteristics and outcomes can probably be identified which have their origin in the role of agriculture in Swedish history, sets of values, or political experiences. The result of these sociological, ethical, and political factors is that pesticides as well as other environmental agents have been put on the agenda of politics and legislation in Sweden at an earlier stage and more emphatically than in many other countries.

These aspects of environment policy will be discussed on the basis of the Swedish decision to reduce pesticide use by 50%, a decision that has attracted interest also in other countries. What is the cultural and political background? Why is it that the opinion and the demand for a decision of this kind first takes place in Sweden, where the problems concerning pesticide use are much less pronounced than in many other countries and agricultural areas? Does the Swedish policy imply a new approach with
completely different conditions for pesticide use, or should it preferably be described as an adaptation to what modern pesticide and agricultural technology can achieve?

**Forces and Factors in Pesticide Use**

In the conventional discussion on pesticides, the approach is frequently dominated by static and egoistic considerations. The whole problem is converted into “What are the consumers prepared to pay?” or “What does society require of the farmers?” These are relevant concerns but at the same time they attend to only part of the truth. This section attempts a more complete and dynamic explanation of the driving forces and changes involved. (Pettersson, 1989, 1990). See also Figure 8.1.

All technological development influences and is influenced by the natural conditions and the values of society. Climatic and cropping conditions are important in problems concerning agricultural production hindered by weeds and pests. Pesticides are used when available to protect crops from pests.

![Figure 8.1. Factors in nature and society affecting the use of pesticides in agriculture.](image-url)