Reporters bungle coverage of 'glyphosate probably causes cancer" determination

Headlines around the globe have proclaimed "the world's most-used pesticides are probably causing cancer." A UN agency has classified some common pesticides, including glyphosate and malathion, as "probably carcinogenic." And as you'd expect based on this stripped-down piece of information, the reaction in many places has been "let's stop using them."

What people aren't reading or hearing in most of these reports is that the use of these pesticides might be preferred to any alternative. Maybe the risk of developing cancer as a result of exposure to the insecticide malathion is much lower than contracting malaria or West Nile virus from mosquitoes. Most of these stories also aren't letting the reader know that their job, if it's shift-work that involves waking up at different times of the day, falls in the same "probably carcinogenic" risk category, or that the alcohol in their beer or wine is actually a higher-risk cancer agent. Perhaps the most important piece of information not included in most of these stories is an explanation of how this UN agency comes up with its classifications ([here's a blog post providing some context on this particular story](#).) All this information that doesn't make the cut, if included, would likely change the impact the story has in the minds of its audience.

For agriculture, there are many examples where the oversimplification of complex issues leads to misconceptions, which in turn, can lead to poor government policy and ill-informed popular trends. Take the Ontario government's approach to bee health for example. Or the Manitoba government's "blame hog farmers" policy that was supposed to revitalize Lake Winnipeg. The growth in gluten-free diets is another illustration of people looking for an (overly) simplified solution to a complicated problem.

Read full, original article: [Caution: This Headline Doesn't Tell the Whole Story — Putting News in Context](#)