

Kenya begins pesticide spraying to fight 'locust swarm of the century,' but critics abound

As the devastating locust invasion continues to spread in East Africa and a new wave of locusts is gathering, pesticide spraying seems the only possible option for Kenya, despite the possible risks to the environment.

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On February 17, the Kenyan government launched a large-scale spraying operation in Wajir, Samburu, and Marsabit counties, where the swarms laid their eggs, and which have now hatched.

"This is the best time to kill them," said Mehari Tesfayohannes Ghebre, Information and Forecasting Officer for the Desert Locust Control Organization in East Africa.

... After Somalia, Ethiopia, and Kenya, swarms are now reaching Uganda, Tanzania, and southern Sudan, while billions of eggs are maturing, promising the arrival of a devastating second wave. The first has already destroyed thousands of hectares in a region where 13 million people are already severely food insecure.

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The pesticides used are numerous: fenitrothion, chlorpyrifos, fipronil, deltamethrin, diflubenzuron, teflubenzuron, triflumuron.

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There is, however, debate in Kenya about this solution. "These products don't only affect locusts, they kill 'useful' insects, such as bees and beetles," says [Timothy] Munywoki [senior agronomist with Amiran Kenya Limited, a major horticultural agribusiness in Kenya]. And without bees, there is no pollination, so no fruit.

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"If you kill the 'beneficial' insects that feed on other 'harmful' insects, it means that you will have to continue spraying chemicals to chase them away," warned Munywoki.

The Department of Agriculture says all the tests have been done and the products are safe for humans and animals.

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