

Consumer pesticide fears spur chemical giant Syngenta to develop more eco-friendly farm technologies

Conventional pesticide makers including Syngenta and Bayer AG have been under pressure in recent years over their products' impact on the environment and biodiversity, as more and more consumers grow more environmentally conscious and distrustful of pesticides used to produce their food.

Climate change, together with the sustainability push, is upending strategies and businesses of well-established companies from oil producers investing in renewable energy to meat producers making plant-based burgers.

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Syngenta is working with farmers to educate them on using pesticides only when needed and safely. It uses digital precision agriculture, which targets diseases, weeds and diseases only where it's needed. In China, for example, it's expanding a network of centers where it helps farmers get higher yields while using less pesticides and fertilizers, and protecting soil and water. It charges farmers per hectare instead of per bottle of pesticide.

"Our goals are aligned – minimize the use of pesticide to control the pest," [said Chief Executive Officer Erik Fyrwald.] Safer chemistries and biotechnology will help reduce pesticides "more and more toward zero," he said. "I don't think it'll get to zero."

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