

# Why some farmers use herbicides

It has been said several times in this column that crop production is mainly about fighting weeds and pests. Weeds are described as plants growing in a place where they are not wanted. They are a nuisance, and it usually takes a lot of effort to remove them.

They use up the soil nutrients intended for the desired crops and they reduce yields and profits. Some people fight weeds with the use of tools such as hand hoes, sickles, and machines such as lawn mowers. Other farmers simply uproot the weeds by hand. Such methods tend to take a lot of time. Slashing weeds in a coffee garden just cuts off the top part of the weeds but the roots remain healthy and active.

Within a few days the weeds sprout and compete with the coffee trees for nutrients. The use of such tools as hoes tends to destroy the soil structure and to facilitate soil erosion.

The use of herbicides, otherwise known as chemical control of weeds, tends to be quicker, more efficient, and less tiresome.

A single farmer may use a spray pump to kill weeds in an acre within half a day — a job that would require machines such as a tractor to plough the land. Using herbicides does not facilitate soil erosion as there is hardly any soil disturbance.

However, it is highly recommended to follow the user directives as laid down by the manufacturer of the herbicides.

Failure to follow the instructions may result in the herbicides being ineffective. They are poisonous and they must be handled with care. Farmers are expected to wear

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protective clothes to avoid the chemicals getting into direct contact with the body. They must be kept away from harvested food crops in the home and far from the reach of children.

They should also be used under the guidance of the area agricultural services extension officer as much as possible. Their application requires skill which can be imparted by trained agriculturists. If mindlessly applied they reduce biodiversity by killing some useful microorganisms, including soil enriching worms and pollinators like bees, and other flying insects.

Their empty containers are also dangerous and they should be carefully disposed of by burning or burying them deep in the ground. It must be borne in mind that all agricultural chemicals pollute the environment if not properly used.

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