

**XXVI INTERNATIONAL  
ECO-CONFERENCE® 2022  
21–23<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER**

# **XII SAFE FOOD**



**PROCEEDINGS**

**NOVI SAD, SERBIA**

**XXVI INTERNATIONAL ECO-CONFERENCE® 2022**

**XII SAFE FOOD**

21<sup>nd</sup> – 23<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2022.

NOVI SAD, SERBIA

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XII SAFE FOOD**  
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**SAFE FOOD**

PROCEEDINGS

2022

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## CONTENT

THE ECOLOGICAL MOVEMENT OF NOVI SAD: AN IMPORTANT DECISION OF ITS PROGRAMME COUNCIL .....	9
FOREWORD .....	21

### INTRODUCTORY PRESENTATION

<i>Vesna Gantner, Vera Popović, Djoko Bunevski, Muhamed Brka, Denis Kučević, Ranko Gantner</i> CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS FOR AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION IN THE UPCOMING ERA .....	25
<i>Slavica Vesković Moračanin, Dragutin Đukić</i> FOOD CONTROL SYSTEMS AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN HEALTH .....	37

### SOIL AND WATER AS THE BASIS FOR AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION OF HEALTHY SAFE FOOD

<i>Dejan Zejak, Velibor Spalevic, Vera Popovic, Mile Markoski, Branislav Dudic, Abdessalam Ouallali, Artan Hysa, Ronaldo Luiz Mincato, Shuraik Kader</i> ANALYSIS OF THE PRESENCE OF HEAVY METALS IN THE SOILS OF THE HILLY-MOUNTAINOUS AREAS OF BALKAN PENINSULA WITH THE ASSESSMENT OF ITS POTENTIAL FOR THE FRUIT GROWING: CASE STUDY OF THE LJUBOVIDJA RIVER BASIN, POLIMLJE, MONTENEGRO .....	51
<i>Gordan Vrbanec, B.Sc.</i> AUTOMATED ECOMONITORING OF WATER IN THE FUNCTION OF SOIL AND WATER PROTECTION.....	63

<i>Ksenija Mačkić, Borivoj Pejić, Ljiljana Nešić, Milivoj Belić, Vladimir Ćirić, Jovica Vasin, Vera Popović, Dragan Radovanović</i> THE STRUCTURE OF VERTISOL SOIL IN THE AREA OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF SMEDEREVO .....	69
---	----

## GENETICS, GENETIC RESOURCES, BREEDING AND GENETIC ENGINEERING IN THE FUNCTION OF HEALTHY SAFE FOOD PRODUCTION

<i>Prof. Dr. Sc. Aleksandar Markovski, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sc. Lenche Velkoska-Markovska</i> GREEK STRAWBERRY TREE ( <i>Arbutus andrachne L.</i> ) GENOTYPES PROPAGATION .....	79
---	----

<i>Vera Popović, Vesna Gantner, Ljubica Šarčević Todosijević, Elizabetha Miskoska Milevska, Marija Mujović, Milica Vujović, Radmila Bojović</i> PRODUCTIVITY OF GLUTEN-FREE PSEUDOCEREAL <i>Fagopyrum esculentum</i> Moench – NOVOSADSKA BUCKWHEAT ON THE CHERNOZEM .....	89
--	----

<i>PhD student, Bojan Laloš, PhD student, Stanka Pešić, Doctor of Science, Violeta Mickovski Stefanović, Mr Predrag Brković, PhD student, Miloš Pavlović, Doctor of Science, Jasmina Bačić, Doctor of Science, Dragana Stanisavljević, Master of Arts, Predrag Ilić</i> BANKUT WHEAT .....	97
---	----

<i>Vladimir M. Filipović, Ljubica Šarčević-Todosijević, Vladan Ugrenović, Slobodan Popović, Milan Ugrinović, Snežana Dimitrijević, Dragana Popović</i> THE INFLUENCE OF DIFFERENT SUBSTRATE MIXTURES ON SEEDLINGS QUALITY AND ECONOMICALLY HIGH YIELD OF TOMATO, PEPPER AND BASIL .....	103
--	-----

## INTEGRATED PLANTS PROTECTION, PESTICIDES APPLICATION AND EFFECTS OF RESIDUES

<i>Assoc. Prof. Dr. sc. Lenche Velkoska-Markovska, Prof. Dr. sc. Biljana Petanovska-Ilievska, Prof. Dr. sc. Aleksandar Markovski</i> APPLICATION OF NORMAL-PHASE HIGH PERFORMANCE LIQUID CHROMATOGRAPHY TO THE ANALYSIS OF SOME PESTICIDE RESIDUES IN APPLE JUICE .....	115
--	-----

<i>Vesna Perišić, Vladimir Perišić, Vera Rajičić, Kristina Luković, Filip Vukajlović</i> SPINOSAD APPLICATION IN PROCESS OF INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT AGAINST <i>RHYZOPERTHA DOMINICA</i> F. IN STORED SMALL GRAINS .....	125
---	-----

*Ljubica Šarčević-Todosijević, Snežana Dorđević, Vera Popović,  
Dragutin Đukić, Marija Perić, Nikola Dorđević, Ljubiša Živanović,  
Ksenija Mačkić, Jelena Bošković, Aleksandar Stevanović*  
THE INFLUENCE OF PESTICIDES ON PLANTS,  
SOIL MICROORGANISMS AND FOOD SAFETY  
IN PLANT PRODUCTION..... 133

*A. Georgieva, J. Miteva-Staleva, E. Krumova, A. Dobрева, G. Jovtchev,  
S. Gateva, Ts. Gerasimova, and Milka Mileva*  
ESSENTIAL OILS FROM BULGARIAN *ROSA ALBA* L.  
AND *ROSA DAMASCENA* MILL. AMPLIFY THE ANTIFUNGAL  
EFFECT OF NYSTATIN..... 141

### AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION IN VIEW OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ASPECT

*Éva Erdélyi, Judit Lovasné Avató*  
IMPACT OF FOOD PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION  
ON THE ENVIRONMENT, GEOGRAPHICAL APPROACH ..... 151

*Zsolt Törösvári, Éva Erdélyi*  
THE ROLE OF FOOD AND DRINK HUNGARIKUMS  
IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY..... 161

### PRODUCTION OF FIELD AND VEGETABLE CROPS FROM THE POINT OF HEALTHY SAFE FOOD

*Bojana Kovačević Berleković, Ana Jovičić Vuković, Tatjana Bošković*  
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SAFE FOOD IN TRAVEL AND TOURISM  
DEVELOPMENT IN THE POST-COVID-19 ERA..... 173

*Jovana Bajkanović, Vesna Vujasinović, Nemanja Lakić*  
STUDENTS 'ATTITUDES TOWARD THE USE  
OF FOOD ADDITIVES ..... 181

### FRUIT AND GRAPES PRODUCTION FROM THE STANDPOINT OF HEALTHY SAFE FOOD

*Elizabeta Miskoska-Milevska, Ana Selamovska, Katerina Nikolic*  
GENOTYPE EXPRESSION OF TRADITIONAL PEAR VARIETY SINEC  
DEPENDING ON ECOLOGICAL FACTORS ..... 191

<i>Prof. Ana Selamovska, Prof. Viktor Gjamovski, Prof. Milena Taseska-Gjorgjijevski, Prof. Dusko Nedelkovski, Prof. Katerina Bandjo Oreshkovikj</i>	
CONTENT OF SOME ANTIOXIDANTS IN THE FRUITS OF AUTOCHTHONOUS APPLE VARIETIES.....	199

<i>Prof. Dr. sc. Ljubica Karakashova, Assist. Prof. Dr. sc. Frosina Babanovska-Milenkovska, MSc. Jelena Mladenova, Assoc. Prof. Dr. sc. Lence Velkoska-Markovska, Assoc. Prof. Dr. sc. Viktorija Stamatovska, Assoc. Prof. Dr. sc. Namik Durmishi</i>	
COMPARISON OF QUALITY PROPERTIES OF FRESH AND SOLAR DRIED <i>GOJI BERRIES (LYCIUM BARBARUM)</i> .....	207

## LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION FROM THE STAND POINT OF HEALTHY SAFE FOOD

<i>Franjo Poljak, Marcela Šperanda, Mirna Gavran, Mislav Đidara, Vera Popović, Vesna Gantner</i>	
THE VARIABILITY OF BIOCHEMICAL PARAMETERS IN BLOOD SERUM AND MILK OF HOLSTEIN COWS REGARDING THE AGE AND HEALTH STATUS.....	219

<i>Željko Mihaljev, Milica Živkov Baloš, Sandra Jakšić, Nenad Popov</i>	
LOAD OF SOIL, FOOD, ANIMAL FEED AND BIOLOGICAL MATERIAL WITH RADIOACTIVE RESIDUES .....	227

<i>Ivana Jožef, Dragan Solić, Marcela Šperanda, Muhamed Brka, Mislav Đidara, Vesna Gantner</i>	
THE CORRELATION BETWEEN SOME DAILY MILK TRAITS AND BIOCHEMICAL PARAMETERS IN PLASMA AND MILK OF DAIRY COWS .....	235

<i>Aleksandra Ivetić, Bojan Stojanović, Vesna Davidović, Milivoje Čosić</i>	
THE USE OF BIOWASTE AS A SILAGE BY-PRODUCT FOR SUSTAINABLE FOOD AND FEED PRODUCTION .....	245

## APPLICATION OF FOOD TECHNOLOGY IN THE PRODUCTION OF HEALTHY SAFE FOOD

<i>Vladimir Filipović Ph.D., Jelena Filipović Ph.D., Milica Nićetin Ph.D., Biljana Lončar Ph.D., Violeta Knežević Ph.D.</i>	
NEW TYPE OF COOKIE PRODUCT WITH DEHYDRATED PEACH.....	255

<i>Doctor of Science, Dragana Stanisavljević, PhD student, Stanka Pešić, Master filolog Predrag Ilić, Doctor of Science, Violeta Mickovski Stefanović</i>	HOME BREWING OF CRAFT BEER .....	263
---	----------------------------------	-----

## ECONOMIC STANDPOINT OF HEALTHY SAFE FOOD PRODUCTION AND MARKETING

<i>Goran Vitomir, Slobodan Popović, Ivanka Vranić, Vinka Vukeljić, Dragan Božović</i>	COOPERATION OF FORENSIC ACCOUNTING AND FORENSIC AUDIT IN FOOD PRODUCTION COMPANIES .....	275
---	---	-----

<i>Jelena Vitomir, Slobodan Popović, Sonja Tomas-Miskin</i>	MACRO-ECONOMIC RESPECT FOR HETEROGENEOUS ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS IN COMPANIES ENGAGED IN THE PRODUCTION OF HEALTHY SAFE FOOD .....	281
---	--	-----

<i>Ivanka Vranić, Slobodan Popović, Goran Vitomir</i>	INDEPENDENT FORENSIC ACCOUNTING IN FOOD COMPANIES .....	287
---	---	-----

<i>Dragan Dokić, Mirna Gavran, Danko Šinka, Vesna Gantner</i>	THE IMPORTANCE OF OPTIMIZING THE VALUE-ADDED TAX RATE IN PIGLET PRODUCTION .....	293
---	---	-----

<i>Zsuzsanna Tóth, Csaba Limbek</i>	COMPARISON OF THE SYSTEM OF EU COMMUNITY TRADEMARKS AND HUNGARIKUMS .....	301
-------------------------------------	--	-----

<i>Sonja Tomas-Miskin, Jelena Vitomir, Slobodan Popović</i>	ECONOMIC RESPECT FOR HETEROGENEOUS FACTORS IN COMPANIES ENGAGED IN THE PRODUCTION OF HEALTHY SAFE FOOD .....	309
---	--	-----

<i>Slobodan Popović, Sonja Tomas-Miskin, Jelena Vitomir</i>	IMPLEMENTATION OF INTERNAL AUDIT IN COMPANIES MAINLY OPERATING IN THE FIELD OF HEALTHY SAFETY PRODUCTION.....	317
---	--	-----

<i>V.V. Zakrevskii</i>	THE ROLE OF THE BIOLOGICAL AND NUTRITIONAL VALUE OF THE DIET IN THE PREVENTION OF CORONAVIRUS INFECTION .....	325
------------------------	--	-----

<i>Ana Janžeković, Lect. Dr. Aleš Golja, Prof. Dr. Andrej Udovč</i>	CURRENT ISSUES ON LESSER-KNOWN FIELD CROPS FOR FOOD SAFETY PURPOSES .....	333
---	--	-----

## NUTRITIONAL FOOD VALUE AND QUALITY NUTRITION

*Jela Ikanović, Vera Popović, Ljubiša Živanović, Ljubiša Kolarić,  
Vera Rajičić, Vladimir Filipović, Ljubičić Nataša, Kristina Kajiš*  
IMPORTANCE OF BROAD BEAN IN THE DIET – POSSIBILITY  
OF MORE RATIONAL USE OF MAIN AND BY-PRODUCTS..... 343

*Vojislav Trkulja, Nikola Ilić, Vera Popović, Vladan Pešić, Ljubiša Kolarić,  
Gordana Dražić, Nikola Rakašćan*  
INFLUENCE OF GENOTYPES AND DIGESTATE  
ON THE PRODUCTIVITY OF THE MORPHOLOGICAL INDICATOR  
OF SILAGE-SORGHUM AS HIGH QUALITY FEED ..... 353

*Maja Milošević, Milica Perović, Zorica Knežević Jugović, Mirjana Antov*  
SOY HULL PECTIC FIBER – HIGHLY VALUABLE FIBER  
EXTRACTED FROM BY-PRODUCT OF SOYBEAN INDUSTRY ..... 363

*Milica Perović, Maja Milošević, Zorica Knežević Jugović, Mirjana Antov*  
GREEN TECHNOLOGY FOR ENHANCED RECOVERY AND  
PROPERTIES OF RuBisCO PROTEIN FROM PUMPKIN LEAVES..... 367

*Svetlana Tepavac, Vesna Vujasinović, Marija Vukadin, Jovana Bajkanović,  
Đurkinjak Mirjana, Račićević Nikoleta*  
STUDENT’S PERCEPTION OF SOURCES AND SIGNIFICANCE  
VITAMINS A AND D IN THE DIET ..... 371

*PhD student Stanka Pešić, PhD student, Bojan Laloš,  
Doctor of Science, Violeta Mickovski Stefanović, Doctor of Science,  
Jasmina Bačić, Doctor of Science, Msc Predrag Brković,  
Dragana Stanisavljević, Master of Arts, Predrag Ilić*  
NUTRITIONAL VALUE OF REFRESHING  
NON-ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES ..... 379

*PhD and DA Agota Vitkay-Kucsera*  
THE IMPACT OF DIET ON ELITE VOCAL PROFESSIONALS  
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO STOMACH ACID REFLUX  
(GERD – GASTROESOPHAGEAL REFLUX DISEASE  
AND LPR – LARYNGOPHAGEAL REFLUX) ..... 385

## LEGAL ASPECTS OF HEALTHY SAFE FOOD PRODUCTS PROTECTION

*Prof. Dr. Joldžić Vladan*  
PRODUCTION OF HEALTHY SAFE FOOD  
IN THE LIGHT OF LAND AND WATER PROTECTION..... 395

*Ana Jovičić Vuković, Bojana Kovačević Berleković,  
 Snježana Gagić Jaraković*  
 THE IMPORTANCE OF THE APPLICATION OF FOOD STANDARDS  
 IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY ..... 405

ECOLOGICAL MODELS AND SOFTWARE  
 IN THE PRODUCTION OF HEALTHY  
 SAFE FOOD

*Ranko Gantner, Gordana Bukvić, Goran Herman, Vesna Gantner*  
 DESIGNING OF FORAGE SYSTEMS FOR IMPROVED  
 SUSTAINABILITY OF CATTLE FARMING AND AGRICULTURE ..... 415

*Ts. Gerasimova, G. Jovtchev, S. Gateva, M. Topashka-Ancheva,  
 Ts. Angelova, A. Dobрева, M. Mileva*  
 STUDY ON POTENTIAL CYTOTOXIC AND CLASTOGENIC  
 EFFECTS OF *ROSA CENTIFOLIA* L. WASTEWATER ..... 423

NAME REGISTRY ..... 433



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Dragutin Đukić<sup>4</sup>, Marija Perić<sup>1</sup>, Nikola Đorđević<sup>2</sup>, Ljubiša Živanović<sup>5</sup>,  
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*Original Scientific paper*

## THE INFLUENCE OF PESTICIDES ON PLANTS, SOIL MICROORGANISMS AND FOOD SAFETY IN PLANT PRODUCTION

### Abstract

Pesticides, is chemical agents for plant protection, and are mostly used in agriculture and forestry (90%), i.e. in plant production. In addition to accumulating in the environment, pesticides act on plants, microorganisms and other members of the biocenosis, and through the food chain, they reach the human body, where they exhibit active biological effects. In this study, the impact of pesticides on plants, soil microorganisms and food safety in crop production is considered.

**Key words:** *pesticides, plants, microorganisms, biological effect, food safety*

### INTRODUCTION

The use of pesticides, i.e. chemical agents for plant protection, is the most radical measure of yield protection against pests, diseases and weeds. Pesticides include more than ten thousand preparations, based on 600 chemical compounds. Their intensive and uncontrolled application causes them to accumulate in the soil, especially in the fertile surface layer, where they affect beneficial microorganisms and other soil



organisms, carbon and nitrogen cycling and other biogenic elements, as well as plant nutrition. From the soil, pesticides get into groundwater, rivers, drinking water, and through food chains into the plant, animal and human body (Đukić et al., 2007; Lakić et al., 2018; Ikanović and Popović, 2020; Ikanović et al., 2020; Božović et al., 2020; Rajčić et al., 2020). In addition to dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane (DDT), the use of which was prohibited in most countries since the 1970s, a large number of other pesticides, which are used to increase yields in modern crop production, have negative effects on the environment and human health (Bagi and Bodnar, 2012; Anđelković, 2018). It has been proven that pesticides have an active biological effect, toxic, mutagenic and carcinogenic, on living organisms. Numerous studies have shown high correlations between exposure to pesticides and the occurrence of various types of cancer (Beard, 2006; Bassil et al., 2007). For the above reasons, the reduction of pesticide use, along with the intensification of preventive and biological protection measures, are the basic goals of sustainable agriculture and sustainable development. In this paper, the impact of pesticides on plants, soil microorganisms and food safety in crop production is discussed.

## INFLUENCE OF PESTICIDES ON PLANTS, SOIL MICROORGANISMS AND FOOD SAFETY

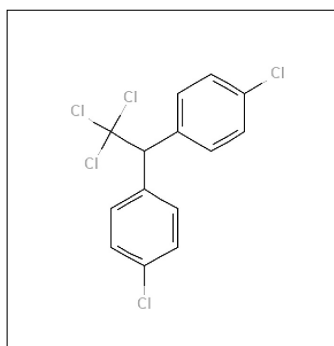
Although pesticides are also used in veterinary medicine, the greatest application, as chemical agents for plant protection, is still found in agriculture and forestry (90%), that is, in plant production. They include more than ten thousand preparations, based on 600 chemical compounds. Pesticides were created precisely as a result of man's desire to produce a larger amount of healthy food, that is, to achieve higher yields in agriculture, but also the need to eradicate diseases, in which pests play the role of transmitters. However, although the application of pesticides represents the most radical measure of yield protection against pests, diseases and weeds, the impact that pesticides have on other members of the biocenosis, and through food chains on the health safety of food, is very complex and diverse (Đukić et al., 2007; Stajkovic et al., 2009).

Different types of pesticides exhibit numerous physiological activities in plant organisms. The impact of pesticides on plants begins from the moment of contact and penetration through the root, stem and leaf. Most herbicides and insecticides with systemic action, acaricides and some fungicides quickly penetrate and move around the plant and have a general effect on the entire plant organism. When developing plants are treated, pesticides penetrate the plant organism to the greatest extent through the leaves (cuticles and pores), in the form of liquid and vapor. In the absence of moisture in the plant, pesticides penetrate through the fatty components of the cell wall via the lipid pathway. Pesticides that are not able to move, are localized at the places of initial penetration into the plant and they have a local effect. The resistance of plants to the action of pesticides is determined by the anatomical and morphological characteristics of the plant, growth stages, applied agrotechnical measures in plant production, chemical composition, doses and forms of preparations. The basis of the resistance of

different plant species to pesticides is their biochemical differences in the exchange of matter during the physiological reaction to these compounds. Depending on the applied dose and type of preparation, pesticides introduced into the soil can change the composition of the soil microflora. There is no doubt that the intensive and uncontrolled application of pesticides causes their accumulation in the soil, especially in the fertile surface layer, where they affect beneficial microorganisms and other soil organisms, the cycle of carbon and nitrogen and other biogenic elements, as well as the nutrition of plants (Đukić et al., 2007, Stajkovic et al., 2009). In addition to plants, soil microorganisms are a key factor that enables the cycling of matter in all ecosystems on the planet and the maintenance of life in the biosphere (Đukić and Đorđević, 2004; Šarčević-Todosijević et al., 2020). A general indicator of the effect of pesticides on the microflora is the biological activity of the soil or the intensity of soil respiration (sorption of O<sub>2</sub>, release of CO<sub>2</sub>). Soil fungicides and fumigants, as a rule, have a negative effect on soil microflora. Fumigants are strong inhibitors of soil microorganisms and are therefore often called soil sterilizers. They prevent the development of heterotrophic microorganisms and stop soil respiration. Fungicides that do not pass into the gaseous phase, that is, do not have a fumigation effect, show a less pronounced sterilization effect, which is caused by their uneven distribution in the soil and heterogeneous soil structure. Đukić et al. (2007) point out that different types of soil fungi are differently sensitive to fungicides. Among the saprophytes, representatives of the genera *Trichoderma*, *Fusarium* and *Penicillium* are the most resistant to fungicides, so in soils treated with fungicides, the mentioned genera dominate in the population of soil fungi. In the doses recommended against soil pests, organochlorine insecticides generally do not have a negative effect on the abundance of soil microorganisms. They have a stimulating effect on the development of certain groups of microorganisms, while at higher doses they initially suppress and then stimulate the soil microflora. Herbicides break down relatively quickly in the soil and their application in the recommended doses does not have a negative impact on the soil microflora. Đukić et al. (2007) state that production doses of herbicides: products of phenyl carboxylic acid, chlorine-substituted aliphatic acids, sym-triazine do not have a clearly expressed effect on the qualitative and quantitative composition of soil saprophytic fungi, bacteria and actinomycetes. However, when herbicides are introduced into the soil in increased doses, there is a temporary regrouping of the composition of the microflora (Đukić and Đorđević, 2004; Đukić et al., 2007; Stajkovic et al., 2009). When considering the impact of pesticides on soil microorganisms, it is important to mention the microbiological transformation of pesticides in the soil. Đukić et al. (2007) point out that in this process in the soil, as well as in the culture of microorganisms, stable products of pesticide transformation can be formed, whose presence and accumulation in the environment and plants is harmful. Favorable conditions for the microbiological synthesis of such compounds, in combination with pesticides, are also created by high doses of applied nitrogen fertilizers. Therefore, during the application of chemical plant protection agents, it is necessary to take into account their interaction in the system pesticides – mineral fertilizers - microorganisms (Đukić et al., 2007).

From the soil, pesticides get into groundwater, rivers, drinking water, and through food chains into plant, animal and human bodies. Although the use of the oldest pe-

sticide dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane (DDT) has been banned in many countries since the 1970s, it has not yet been completely eliminated from the environment, and exposure to the pesticide is still widespread. In developed countries, the slow elimination from the body means that a large part of the population still has detectable levels of DDT, or its metabolite DDE, in their serum or adipose tissue. In developing countries, the pesticide is still used for vector control and a significant proportion of infants have daily intakes above recommended levels. However, recent breast cancer research, conducted using cohort studies, has allowed for a more rigorous assessment of the role of DDT in the etiology of the disease. However, recent breast cancer research, conducted using cohort studies, has allowed for a more rigorous assessment of the role of DDT in the etiology of the disease (Beard, 2006).



*Figure 1. Chemical structure of dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane (DDT) (source: National Library of Medicine/National Center for Biotechnology Information <https://pubchem.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/compound/Clofenotane#section=2D-Structure>)*

A large number of other pesticides, which are used to increase yields in modern crop production, have negative effects on the environment and human health (Bagi and Bodnar, 2012; Anđelković, 2018). It has been proven that pesticides have an active biological effect, toxic, mutagenic and carcinogenic, on living organisms (Đorđević et al., 2020). Toxins are substances that are dangerous for living organisms due to the harmful effects they cause in cells, tissues, organs and biochemical processes. The fate of toxins in the body depends on the way they are ingested; toxic substances that are present in food and water enter the body through the digestive tract (Anđelković, 2018). Margni et al. (2002) state that the intake of pesticide residues through food results in the highest exposure of the human body to their toxic effect, as much as 103 to 105 times greater than the intake of pesticides into the body through drinking water or inhalation. Based on this, they emphasize that monitoring pesticide residues in food should be a priority in the production of health-safe food (Margni et al., 2002). However, the organophosphate pesticide parathion is easily adsorbed through the skin, lungs or digestive tract and is equally toxic regardless of how it enters the human body (Anđelković, 2018). The common biochemical mechanism of action of organophos-

phates in the composition of this group of pesticides is based on inhibition of the activity of the enzyme AChE (acetylcholinesterase) of blood, brain and other tissues. Inhibition of AChE causes the accumulation of ACh (acetylcholine) at the central and neuroeffector synapses of the cholinergic nervous system, which leads to impaired neurotransmission. Irreversible AChE inhibitors can thus lead to muscle paralysis, convulsions and bronchoconstriction, and death due to asphyxiation. In addition to the above, organophosphates also have a non-specific effect on other enzyme systems, as well as a general toxic effect, especially on the liver and blood components (Massoulié et al., 2008; Pohanka, 2011).

Mutagens are environmental agents that change the genetic information of organisms. A significant number of mutations introduce the cells of living organisms into malignant processes, so mutagens are carcinogens at the same time. Cancer is one of the leading causes of death in the world. Experiments performed on cell transformation in *in vitro* conditions, using DNA isolated from cancer cells, indicated the genetic mechanisms of carcinogenesis. Based on empirical data confirmed in numerous experimental models, it was concluded that mutation or activation of one gene is not enough, but can be a trigger for a cascade process, that is, mutation or activation of a number of other genes. There are three types of evidence for this claim: evidence based on DNA analysis from different stages of carcinogenesis; evidence based on the increased expression in cell cultures and experimental animals of oncogenes, that is, genes that encode proteins, which are capable of inducing carcinogenesis in a living organism; as well as evidence from epidemiology. Namely, all cancer cells have a clonal origin, and the incidence of cancer increases with age (Zimonjić i sar., 1990; Marinković and Marinković, 2012, Đorđević et al., 2020). It has been proven that certain types of pesticides can play a significant role in the described genesis of malignant processes in the body. Numerous studies have shown high correlations of exposure to pesticides with the occurrence of lymphoma, leukemia and solid tumors (especially brain and prostate). Illnesses generally occur as a result of long-term exposure to high doses of pesticides, and in some cases, specific pesticides have been identified that caused the illnesses (Bassil et al., 2007).

Back in 1983, Fujii and Inoue established specificity in the action of pesticides on organisms. They tested on soybeans the mutagenic activities of several types of pesticides used in agriculture. For several types of pesticides (lebaycid, diazinon, EPN, karpfos), no mutagenic activity was determined. An increase in the mutation rate was found for ecatin. Then, tests were carried out for ecatin using *in vitro* or *in vivo* methods on microorganisms. However, systematic tests of bacteria gave negative results in all cases, so the authors conclude that the manifestation of mutagenic activity of ecatin is specific for plants (Fujii and Inoue, 1983).

Brkić et al. (2006), using the Ames test, examined the genotoxic properties of the herbicide GAL-57, containing two active ingredients; bentazon and dicamba. Taxons *Salmonella typhimurium* and *Escherichia coli* were tested. The authors state that the results showed that there was neither a biological nor a statistically significant increase in the mutation factor, on the basis of which they concluded that the herbicide GAL-57, has no genotoxic properties (with or without metabolic activation) under experimental conditions in the Ames test (Brkić et al., 2006).

Results like those obtained by Brkić et al. (2006) are encouraging. However, sustainable, rational and safe use of pesticides in crop production is necessary. The absence of a legal framework for the application of pesticides, significantly increased uncontrolled use of low quality pesticides in many parts of the world. With the aim of protecting the environment and human health, the maximum allowable concentrations (MACs) of pesticides and their decomposition products, which can be present in food, have been determined. These concentrations do not lead to health damage or any physiological effect in the most sensitive individuals (Bagi and Bodnar, 2012).

Reducing the use of pesticides, along with the intensification of preventive and biological protection measures, are the basic goals of sustainable agriculture and sustainable development. Biopesticides represent one of the most significant discoveries of biotechnology. Biopesticides reduce environmental pollution and enable preservation of food safety (Đukić et al., 2007; Šarčević-Todosijević et al., 2019; Popović et al., 2019; Stevanović et al., 2019). It is important to mention the use of microbial antagonists in the control of plant pathogens. Antagonistic microorganisms have shown the potential to inhibit the growth and proliferation of various phytopathogens, with little or no negative side effects on the environment.

## CONCLUSION

Intensive and uncontrolled application of pesticides causes their accumulation in the soil, in which they affect beneficial microorganisms and other soil organisms, the cycling of biogenic elements, as well as the nutrition of plants. From the soil, pesticides get into groundwater, rivers, drinking water, and through food chains into the plant, animal and human body, in which they exhibit an active toxic, mutagenic and carcinogenic effect. Therefore, in the protection of the environment and the production of safe food, it is necessary to reduce the use of pesticides, while intensifying preventive and biological protection measures.

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## **UTICAJ PESTICIDA NA BILJKE, MIKROORGANIZME ZEMLJIŠTA I ZDRAVSTVENU BEZBEDNOST HRANE U BILJNOJ PROIZVODNJI**

### **Rezime**

Pesticidi, su hemijska sredstva za zaštitu bilja, i najviše se upotrebljavaju u poljoprivredi i šumarstvu (90%), odnosno u biljnoj proizvodnji. Pored akumuliranja u životnoj sredini, pesticidi djeluju na biljke, mikroorganizme i ostale članove biocenoza, a preko lanaca ishrane, dospavaju i u organizam čoveka, u kojem ispoljavaju aktivna biološka dejstva. U ovoj stidiji razmatra se uticaj pesticida na biljke, mikroorganizme zemljišta i zdravstvenu bezbednost hrane u biljnoj proizvodnji.

**Ključne reči:** *pesticidi, biljke, mikroorganizmi, biološko dejstvo, zdravstvena bezbednost hrane*

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