



Environmental

Advocates

NY

Toxic Sewage Sludge on Farmland

How to stop contamination of our food, water, and soil with toxic chemicals

Background

New York State has been promoting the spread of contaminated sewage sludge, also known as biosolids, on our farmland as a way to recycle and process our sewage. This sludge has been found to be contaminated with [PFAS, or “forever chemicals”](#)¹, pharmaceuticals, [pesticides](#)², and [antifungal medications](#)³.

Applying them to our land puts [our soil, farmland, and groundwater at risk](#)⁴. PFAS chemicals are linked to [developmental delays, decreased fertility, increase in some cancers, interference with hormonal health, and reduced immune system capacity](#)⁵.

According to the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, [22% of our biosolids were “recycled” through land application, composting, or heat drying in New York State in 2023, with nearly 47% in 2008](#)⁶.

In January 2025, the EPA released their [Draft Risk Assessment on PFAS chemicals in biosolids](#)⁷ noting the elevated risk to farmers and communities living in proximity to biosolids spreading, and communities whose drinking water sources can be contaminated by spreading. This is a public health, rural dignity, and food systems issue.

Legislation

To address this crisis, we need to pass [S.5759](#) Harckham/ [A.6192](#) Kelles which creates a moratorium on land application of sludge for five years, requires PFAS testing for sludge, soil, and groundwater at impacted sites, and creates a grant program to help farmers with contaminated farmland.

For more information, contact Claire Walsh Winsler at cwalshwinsler@eany.org.

Sources:

1. <https://www.epa.gov/pfas/pfas-explained>
2. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0048969725005893>
3. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0048969723006149>
4. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S004313542101229X>
5. <https://www.epa.gov/pfas/our-current-understanding-human-health-and-environmental-risk-s-pfas>
6. <https://dec.ny.gov/sites/default/files/2024-05/finalsswmp20232.pdf>
7. <https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2025-01/fact-sheet-draft-sewage-sludge-risk-assessment-pfoa-pfos.pdf>