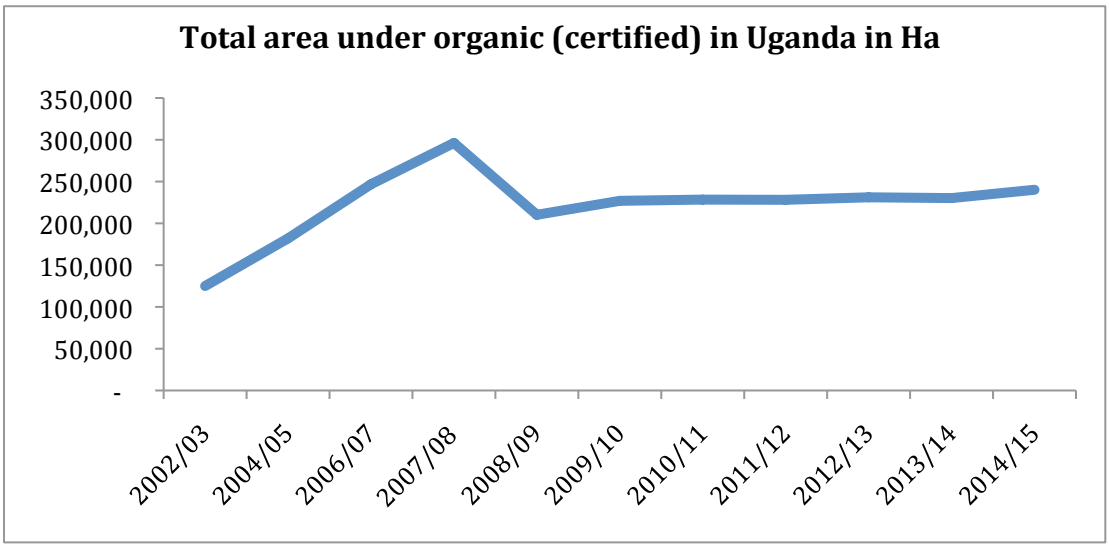
Approval of Pesticides and Government Spray Programmes

Pacific Organic Policy Toolkit
http://www.organicpasifika.com/poetcom

Approval of pesticides and government spray programs

The best scenario to protect the organic agriculture sector from economically damaging contamination is an outright ban on the most problematic synthetic pesticides. This happened for DDT in most developed countries as early as in the 70s and 80s for agricultural use and got expanded to nearly the whole world after the Stockholm Convention in 2004, although the chemical is still used in certain countries against mosquitoes. Some governments have cancelled registrations for pesticides when indicated through studies and/or pesticide poisoning cases.

Mass pesticide spraying is one of the government decisions (together with GMO approval) that can have the single most sudden detrimental impact on a national organic sector. A case in point is the story of DDT spraying to combat malaria in **Uganda** in 2008. That year, the Ugandan Ministry of Health took the decision to apply Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT) to control malaria on a large scale. Each house, in an entire region, received compulsory DDT spraying, and even though the spraying was indoor residual spray, the contamination impact on organic products that are stored in-house after the harvest, was huge and expected to last many years after the spraying. Indeed, any detectable trace of DDT on organic products made their certification invalid for their target market: the EU market. The 2008 compulsory spraying led to the permanent loss of organic certification status of more than 16,000 organic farms in Uganda, and had a tremendous and long-lasting impact on the Ugandan organic sector, as shown by the graph below:



Since 2008, the juridical battle has been ongoing between the Ugandan government and the opponents of DDT use (amongst which the organic companies and the Uganda Network on Toxic-Free Malaria Control), so the future of DDT use in Uganda is uncertain.

Egypt is an example of a country that had a very anti-organic approach to pest management in cotton, whereby the government, starting in the 50s, organized a

program of intensive use of chemical insecticides that were sprayed by airplane 3-4 times a season. But the government's approach changed radically in the early 90s, after SEKEM, an organic company, demonstrated the effectiveness of organic pest control. The Egyptian Ministry of Agriculture sponsored further and more extensive tests. Within three years, the ministry agreed that organic pest suppression was superior for cotton farming and began converting nearly the entire area of Egyptian cotton, 4,000 square kilometers, to organic methods for controlling pests (including pheromones). Aerial spraying of pesticides on cotton became prohibited. The conversion took two years. It resulted in a reduction in the use of synthetic pesticides in Egypt by 90 % and an increase in the average yield of raw cotton of 30%. In 1997, the government cancelled all conventional insecticides used to control the cotton leaf worm in vegetable and other crops, and several other products were banned due to possible carcinogenesis. In the following years, the Ministry of Agriculture supported the mass production and use of a number of biological controls and biopesticides (including Trichogramma evanescens, Chrysopa vulgaris larvae and mites, Bioeanza, Protecto, Virotecto).

The health impact of synthetic pesticides regularly comes to the spotlight. The latest product in the spotlight is the herbicide glyphosate, of which the first country to implement a complete ban on imports and use was Sri Lanka in June 2015. The decision followed the election of the new president, Maithripala Sirisena, a farmer and previously the country's Health Minister. Following the classification of glyphosate as a probable carcinogen by the WHO in 2015, other countries are considering bans or restrictions.