

A coalition of public-interest groups has sued the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for approving widespread spraying of streptomycin, a medically important antibiotic, on citrus trees to prevent or treat citrus greening disease and citrus canker.

The [group](#) consisting of farmworkers, health-justice and conservation organizations, stated in a press release that the practice of spraying antibiotics on trees has proven highly ineffective in combating these diseases, and it can drive antibiotic resistance in bacteria that threaten human health.

According to the lawsuit, the EPA failed to ensure that the approved uses of streptomycin as a pesticide would not cause unreasonable harm to human health or the environment and failed to adequately assess impacts to endangered species.

The agency's decision gave the green light to the use of more than 650,000 pounds of streptomycin on citrus crops in Florida and California.

Streptomycin belongs to a class of antibiotics the World Health Organization considers critically important to treating human disease.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Food and Drug Administration have expressed concerns about the use of medically important antibiotics as pesticides and have spoken out publicly against it.

"Farmworkers are already exposed to a mix of toxic pesticides in the course of their daily work," Jeannie Economos, pesticide safety and environmental health project coordinator at Farmworker Association of Florida said.

"The EPA should look at effective ways to control citrus diseases that are safe for our food supply and for the essential workers and their families who sustain our food system."

"Allowing lifesaving antibiotics to be used as pesticides is an unnecessary and dangerous practice that fuels a growing public health epidemic: antibiotic resistance," Allison Johnson, a sustainable food policy advocate at NRDC said.

"The more you use antibiotics, the greater the risk that bacteria resistant to the drugs will flourish and spread," Matt Wellington public health campaigns director for U.S. PIRG said.

According to the press release, the EPA's analysis indicates that the widespread use of streptomycin could also have harmful long-term effects on mammals that forage in treated fields.

The agency has not analyzed how this change could affect specific endangered and threatened mammals that forage or nest in and around these citrus groves, or that rely on waterways contaminated by the antibiotic.

It also stated that neither has the EPA adequately assessed the risk that streptomycin poses to pollinators, whose health and survival are already compromised by a wide range of stressors, including other pesticides.