

SET AGRICULTURAL PRIORITIES RIGHT: CLEAN PRODUCTION AND SAFE FOOD IN A HEALTHY SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT

PESTICIDES

Introduction

The EU's involvement in agriculture dates back to the early days of the European Community. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was established to ensure the security of food supplies across Europe. However, it became too successful in increasing production, and created various social, environmental and economic problems in both the Member States and other countries in the world affected by the export policy that forms part of the CAP. Farmland wildlife decline, water pollution and over-use, acid rain and food safety scandals have caused concern among EU citizens. Since the early 1990s, the EU has started to develop flanking policies (rural development including agri-environment schemes and cross-compliance) and reform the policies that created large surpluses. But changes have been lacking in ambition, due to the strong influence of various vested interests across Europe.

Pesticide use remains at high and unsustainable levels. Inappropriate and/or excessive use has led to pollution of drinking water supplies and unacceptable residue levels in some foods. The EU's policies have so far been unable to address these problems effectively. An EU instrument to reduce the overall use of pesticides is needed in addition to the EU Marketing Authorisation Directive, which deals with the most hazardous pesticides. Several Member States have already successfully achieved a reduction in the use of pesticides without significant agricultural production losses.

The European Parliament currently has limited power in the field of agriculture. We hope this will change in the new Constitution. However, even in the absence of full 'co-decision' in this policy area, MEPs can take action to bring about change by promoting an efficient national implementation of EU policies and calling on the Council and the Commission to bring forward measures.

THE NEXT EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT SHOULD

• **on the strategy for pesticide use**

Insist on the adoption of a strategy both to reduce and improve pesticide use, with mandatory targets to reduce pesticide use by 50% in 10 years. Safety measures for the application of pesticides should be improved. The substitution of hazardous pesticides with safer alternatives should be promoted.

What important decisions were taken at EU level in the past and what role did the European Parliament play?

1. Evaluation and Authorisation Programme for 834 active ingredients (91/414/EC):

In 2001 the Commission presented a progress report, which showed that work was much too slow and the 2003 deadline for completing the work would not be met. The report suggested an extension until 2008. The Parliament was very critical of the report and asked for the procedure to be speeded up by implementing the precautionary principle, which means that inherently very dangerous substances, such as carcinogenic, persistent or bio-accumulative ones, should immediately be banned instead of going through the full risk assessment.

A revision of the Pesticides Authorisation Directive 91/414/EC has been planned by the Commission but has also been postponed so far. It is expected that the new European Parliament will receive a Commission proposal for revising 91/414/EC and – if sticking with its initial criticism from the Commission – could ensure that a quicker and more protective regime is put in place.

Questions:

- Do you agree that pesticides, which are persistent or have persistent break-down products and thus accumulate in the environment, or pesticides which cause irreversible damages like cancer, or interfere with hormone systems, should be banned immediately?
- If you are elected MEP will you support initiatives and proposals to achieve this?

2. Thematic Strategy for Sustainable Use of Pesticides:

The Commission presented in 2002 its concepts for such a strategy. The European Parliament passed a resolution in 2003 asking the Commission to include legally binding or economic instruments. It stressed the need for urgent and mandatory complementary action on pesticide use reduction. However, MEPs did not vote for a 50% reduction within ten years, as the NGOs had requested.

The Commission is resisting the idea of putting in place a clear and legally binding pesticide use reduction objective. If MEPs had supported such a target more vehemently, the Commission would have been under more pressure.

It is expected that the new EP will receive legislative or action programme proposals for a sustainable use of pesticides.

Questions:

- Do you support that, in order to move towards a sustainable use of pesticides besides banning the most dangerous ones, overall use has to be reduced in a harmonised and legally binding way?
- If you are elected MEP will you support and vote in favour of legislative or action programme proposals to achieve such reductions?