

Conclusion of the chairman

1. The background to the symposium "feeding Europe with less pesticides" held at the European Parliament on 4 November 2014, is the very strong desire, throughout society, to achieve fully sustainable agriculture. Addressing pesticide use is central to this aim. The symposium itself was organised by PAN, IOBC-WPRS, IBMA and Greenpeace and hosted by Benedek Javor MEP. It followed similar meetings in recent years and again drew significant interest and attendances from concerned sectors of the industry.

2. The symposium concentrated on three major themes:

- Where we are now,
- Success stories in reducing pesticide use and
- Ways forward to reduce pesticide use in the EU.

The key messages emerging from presentations and discussion are summarised in points 3-5 below. Points 6 and 7 form the chairman's reflections and conclusions as to the road forward.

3. Where we are now:

- Substantial legislation and support measures have been in place in the EU for more than 20 years to deliver reduced and more precise pesticide use in agricultural production. Nevertheless, there is serious concern, based not least on MS NAP implementation plans, that the obligations and opportunities provided are neither well used nor fulfilled. As a result, benefits for farmers, human health and the environment are not being fully realised;
- IPM is a knowledge based, systematic and well understood approach to crop production and protection which can deliver a very valuable contribution to sustainable agriculture. But its potential is far from fulfilled and progress on its implementation is stalled.
- Parts of the retail sector are playing a major role in reducing pesticide use notably in the horticulture sector. This role extends beyond the farm to households and gardens. Their customers are increasingly better informed and responsive and can be an important driving force for change.

4. Success stories in reducing pesticide use:

- Significant success has been achieved in reducing pesticide use at farm level. Research, advice and continuous formation are central to this success.
- Examples of successful approaches abound in the viticulture, maize, fruit, potatoes and horticulture sectors including mushrooms. These examples are very largely based in IPM.

- Specifically targeted agri-environment schemes can play a role in increasing crop protection and production in crops such as peas and carrots (at least) where field margin species encourage pollinators and positive predators.

5. Ways forward to reduce pesticide use in the EU:

- From the perspective of specific pesticide legislation, the SUPD is a powerful instrument with which to drive forward reduced pesticide use and IPM. However, it needs to be understood that, in the EU, subsidiarity is an important concept which has to be respected. It is neither possible nor practical to regulate all details at EU level. The Commission shortly will bring forward the report foreseen for November 2014 on MS NAP content and implementation. Getting to this stage has involved considerable effort which should not be underestimated. A further report is foreseen in 2018 when it will be possible to better monitor progress.
- CAP legislation provides possibilities for pesticide use reduction in both its pillars. However, while benefits emanating through crop rotation from crop diversification are theoretically available, the rules governing EFAs do not prohibit pesticide use notably in so far as short rotation coppices and specific crops considered as fulfilling the EFA requirement are concerned. The Commission is committed to examining the implementation of greening already in 2015 and thereafter to the midterm review of the CAP. Prejudgement of the outcome of these tasks would be premature given that the Council and European Parliament agreed the reform only in 2013.

Despite the above, there is concern that feeding Europe with less pesticides is not yet working. This manifested itself in the following comments from participants;

- The perceived limited ambition in the MS NAPs despite the long term presence of pesticide regulations;
- The apparent absence of urgency in driving implementation of the SUPD;
- The "softness" inherent in the CAP greening approach not least in so far as the EFA cropping pesticide use possibilities and the absence of rotation obligations are concerned and
- The absence of the SUPD from CAP cross-compliance and the unintended encouragement of non implementation and hence non inclusion due to the legal wording;
- The apparent inconsistency between EU policies despite their common aim of achieving sustainable agriculture and
- The difficulty for citizens to understand the limited progress on a common goal which is not contentious and brings benefits, including economic benefits, to farmers. Citizens do not understand this nor the use of

concepts such as subsidiarity as a tool to obstruct progress.

6. Reflection:

Considerable progress has been made in reducing pesticide use in the EU. The legislation and policy support provide obligations and opportunities to apply, at farm level, principles which could lead to further progress. Nevertheless, the MS implementation reports under the SUPD appear to suggest little or limited ambition. This is disappointing given the benefits for society and the general welcome for improved use across the industry. So what is wrong and how can the obstacles be overcome? How can IPM move to mainstream farm practice?

The Commission implementation report on the SUPD NAPs is due shortly and will provide an opportunity to focus on the quality of implementation not least by civil society and the European Parliament. Debate is required so as to clarify the situation regarding the extent of implementation, pitfalls and successes, and to stimulate action to garner all potential benefits. There is an inherent risk that implementation of the directive could fall into a backwater priority without the stimulus of their active interest. This would encourage real progress and avoid the tedium of recourse to infringement procedures. Positive cooperative implementation has to be the goal. The full use of the possibilities for SUPD implementation within the CAP needs continuous review and including through the farm advisory system.

The perceived best approach to reduced pesticide use is generally agreed to be IPM. At the 2013 conference, it was emphasised that IPM treats crop production as a system rather than the sum of independent parts. It gives meaning to the concept of the soil being part of nature's capital capable of playing a much greater role in crop production than simply being the medium through which fossil fuels are transformed into agricultural production with the aid of external inputs including pesticides. At that meeting, the blockages to full uptake of IPM were identified as including the registration and authorisation processes for biological control agents (a huge difficulty), the lack of research, the absence of biological control centres across the EU, limited citizen awareness, limited interest by some chemical companies as well as lack of ambition in the NAPs and in the CAP. To these, farmer knowledge, awareness and training must be added (together with similar awareness, training at the regional authority and extension services level). If these blockages are not addressed it is likely that IPM will not be achieved nor the accruing benefits.

7. Conclusions

The timetables set out above in point 5 with respect to the SUPD and CAP underline that further opportunities will exist to pursue IPM. To help this process two further approaches are recommended. These are;

- That the EP, in its response to the forthcoming Commission report, prepare its own report on what's going well and what poorly at MS level so as to focus efforts towards full implementation of the SUPD and garner the potential inherent in IPM.
- That the Commission prepare a Roadmap to full IPM which would provide targets and dates for staged but full implementation. The roadmap should deal systematically with all the blockages via cooperative work with the sector, stimulation of farmers through relevant funds where appropriate and progressive legislation where required. Ideally, in preparing this roadmap, all relevant parties should be encouraged to play a constructive role. The Commission's report on SUPD implementation could usefully launch this work. In doing so, a very positive approach could be to set a series of interim targets such as on registration, research and innovation, the full uptake of good farm practice, the extent of IPM uptake within the lifetime of current plans and the extent of biological control and reduction of pesticide use to be achieved.