



Food Authority EFSA gives an extra swing to the pesticide treadmill

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), in the holiday period¹, published a 'protocol' for the implementation of a major pesticide derogation, Article 4.7 of Regulation 1107/2009. The derogation will be used for pesticides that are currently still on the EU market but are about to be banned based on the 2009-pesticide Regulation that includes "cut-off" provisions for classified carcinogenic, reprotoxic or endocrine disruptive pesticides². Examples are the pesticides Glufosinate (causing birth defects), Epoxiconazole (birth defects, liver cancer), Flumioxazin (toxic for reproduction & for endocrine organs), Pymetrozin (cancers, reduction fertility & effects on endocrine organs). The derogation will allow use in specific crops in case of a "serious danger for plant health" in spite of the full ban of these pesticides.

In EFSA's opinion -very remarkably- herbicides can qualify for this derogation while the opinion itself states that "weeds in a strict sense do not directly pose a threat to plant health".

EFSA additionally thinks that due to the growing resistance of weeds against herbicides, for every crop in the EU, a range of herbicides need to be available with a different working spectrum. In some cases even 4 different classes of herbicides. This means that if three classes of herbicides are available for a given crop, the derogation still can be applied for the classified herbicide as the number 4 herbicide.

While EFSA mentions that priority has to be given to non-chemical methods³, weed control such as mechanical weeding are easily dismissed by EFSA for being less applicable, reliable and effective.

PAN Europe feels that this protocol is a scandal. Weeds will in the worst case cause a reduction of the yield of a crop and not be a serious danger to plant health. Allowing herbicides to be part of the Article 4.7-derogation is a grave misuse of the rules.

Even worse is the policy embraced by EFSA on pesticide resistance. Instead of reducing the use of pesticides by sustainable practices (like crop rotation, mechanical weeding), EFSA promotes the all-out use of synthetic pesticides to fight weeds. Resistance caused by overuse of pesticides needs to be countered by use of more pesticides, according to the Authority. This is the chemical treadmill. A dead-end street. EFSA fully ignores the 'Sustainable use of pesticides Directive'⁴ that provides that pesticides can only be used as a last resort. The panel at EFSA in the 'plant health group'⁵ seems to have no knowledge of sustainable crop growing and dismisses available and widely used non-chemical methods.

Hans Muilerman of PAN Europe states: 'the EU member states should not accept this EFSA protocol since it is undermining sustainable agriculture and decades of environmental and health policy'.

¹ EFSA Journal August 4, <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/supporting/pub/1060e>

² Regulation 1107/2009, article 4.1

³ Directive 128/2009

⁴ Directive 128/2009

⁵ <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/plant-health/working-groups>