

Time for PURE in Europe

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WHAT IS PURE?

PURE stands for Pesticides Use Reduction in Europe, and is the title of a campaign launched in May 2002 by Pesticide Action Network (PAN) Europe. Starting in 2000, several public interest groups across Europe agreed to work together on proposing measures to reduce the impact of pesticides on human health and the environment. We believe that these measures need to be included in a specific European Union (EU) directive which is legally-binding on Member States. In early 2001, a PURE Working Group began to meet and discuss the legal basis for a suggested PURE directive. As a result, we published the text of our proposed directive in May 2002¹, with a detailed Explanatory Memorandum which describes the factual and scientific rationale for reducing pesticide use². By June 2004, 91 organisations in 30 countries representing the environment, food, public health, consumers, farming and trade unions, had signed up to support our campaign for a PURE Directive (see below).

WHY DO WE NEED EU LEGISLATION TO REDUCE PESTICIDE USE?

Available evidence shows that the tonnage of active ingredients of pesticides across the European Union is increasing³, causing long term, low dose, combination harm to human health and biodiversity and contamination of the environment. This is unsustainable. Water companies have had to install expensive plant to remove pesticides and it is now official policy in many EU member states to drive down pesticide residues in food. Between 1992 and 1999, annual pesticide sales in EU countries increased from 295,289 tonnes of active ingredient to 326,870 tonnes. Within this period, there was a slight decrease in sales between 1992 and 1995, but there has been a general increase since 1996. Of course, pesticide sales do not accurately reflect the risks of using these products: the type of product, its toxicity, how long it remains in the environment, what happens to it in water and how it reacts to different cultivation techniques are all relevant. But because there is so much disagreement about how to measure these risks accurately, the proposed PURE directive is a fresh initiative to leave the arguments about risk indicators behind, to reduce exposure to all pesticides and hence reduce direct harm to humans and organisms in the ecosystem and protect biodiversity (indirect impacts).

A study released by the European Environment Agency (EEA) in 1995 showed just how much pesticide damage there is⁴. Pesticide levels in groundwater were found to be increasing and were estimated to exceed the target on 75% of agricultural land in the EU and EFTA (European Free Trade Area). Since 65% of European consumers rely on groundwater for their drinking water supplies, PAN Europe is determined to protect this natural resource. In the wider environment, the impact of pesticides is just as serious. Pesticides are now known to harm birds, fish, and beneficial insects⁵. In the UK, the use of pesticides has reduced the insect food available to chicks and led to declines in numbers of grey partridge and corn bunting, for example. In 1997 a report said that pesticides were a factor in the decline of UK farmland bird species over the previous 30 years.

In Germany, more than 130 plants found around farmland are endangered or have disappeared. Another German study worked out how much using pesticides cost the country's biodiversity each year: the figure was 10 million DM or five million Euros. In Denmark, a 2002 report found that using herbicides and insecticides at half or a quarter their normal strength led to higher levels of farmland wildlife, including more weed and wild flowers and insects. These impacts are the result of intensive, conventional farming. But what about organic farming, which the proposed PURE directive supports? Investigations in Germany have found that areas close to organic farms have more biodiversity than areas close to

conventional farms. In a two year study of Austrian soils, beetles were 94% more abundant in organic fields than in conventional ones.

While there is not yet a large body of work to show organic farming is better for human health, there are a number of studies which implicate pesticides in poor health, for chronic, low-dose exposure as well as acute toxicity. Children are particularly sensitive, and this was recognised in the WHO/EEA 2002 report⁶ entitled "Children Health and Environment: A review of evidence." (see also PAN Europe Briefing No. 2 *Why current European pesticide legislation fails to protect our health*). In the late 1990s, the European Federation of Agricultural Workers did a survey of pesticide poisoning among its two million members⁷. A total of 1,230 questionnaires from individuals and organisations were analysed, and the results showed that one in five workers thought they had been made ill, poisoned or badly affected by pesticides.

Concerns about health were behind the EU's decision in 1980 to set the limit for a single pesticide in drinking water at 0.1 micrograms per litre, or one part in ten billion. The scientists who recommended this figure were acting on the precautionary principle because they did not know about the long term effects of pesticide mixes on human health or the environment. This is still the position today. The precautionary principle was used again to keep maximum residue levels (MRLs) in baby food at the detection limit (see Explanatory Memorandum p7).

WHAT ARE WE DEMANDING IN THE PURE CAMPAIGN?

To change EU law and ensure that every member state adopts measures which would lead to dramatic reductions in pesticide use, exposure and risks as well as outright bans over a short period. Reduction of dependency and exposure would be done through a new PURE directive. An accompanying directive would introduce a levy on pesticide sales to pay for other ways of controlling pests. Looking at the proposed directive in more detail, it would:

- (1) Begin with national studies evaluating consequences, costs and benefits of various scenarios for reducing the use of pesticides to meet the directive's targets;
- (2) Mandatory national action plans with targets and timetable for reducing the use of pesticides (targets to cut pesticide use by 25% within five years of the directive's start date and by 50% within ten years of the same date);
- (3) Allow full access to information held on pesticides by authorities, including information supporting specific regulatory decisions and coordinated monitoring, data collection of the impacts of pesticides use on human health and the environment and long-term research programmes;
- (4) Stakeholders participation in drawing up national pesticides reduction plans;
- (5) Make integrated crop management (ICM) and integrated pest management (IPM) the minimum standards for all EU farmers and other pesticide users. Farmers would have to use these methods if they wanted common agricultural policy (CAP) subsidies;
- (6) Pay more CAP subsidies to farmers for agri-environment schemes, particularly organic farming. Within ten years of the directive's start date, 30% of all a member state's cultivated land should be organic;
- (7) Train and certify all dealers in and professional users of pesticides, including farmers;
- (8) Stop unsafe practice by inspecting pesticide application equipment and storage facilities;
- (9) Collect data on the production, sales and use of pesticides and enforce record keeping and the reporting of pesticide applications and the amount used on each crop;
- (10) Ban pesticide applications from the air and on vulnerable land such as conservation areas and water catchments.

WHAT HAS THE PURE CAMPAIGN ACHIEVED SO FAR?

In the past, the 5th Environmental Action Plans (EAP) covering the period 1993 to 2000 has promised much but delivered very little. Since then, other than implementing Directive 91/414/EEC on pesticide registration scheme and the Biocides Directive (98/8/EC), the EU has taken no further legislative action. The 5th EAP called for the EU to achieve a significant reduction in pesticide use before the year 2000. This hasn't happened. The fifth EAP also called for farmers to convert to integrated pest management (IPM), especially in important nature conservation areas. The programme listed three requirements for meeting its targets: registration of the sale and use of plant protection products (PPPs); control of the sale and use of PPPs; and promotion of IPM. In practice, the review of active ingredients of plant protection product being carried out under Directive 91/414/EEC is badly delayed.

According to the Commission's statement on the sixth EAP, there is now enough evidence to show that the damage caused by pesticides is serious and growing. Contaminated groundwater and food and the accumulation of certain pesticides in plants and animals are acknowledged in the statement. The Commission recognises that what happens when small amounts of pollutants collect in human bodies is poorly understood. Consequently, the sixth EAP recognised the need to protect vulnerable groups such as children and the elderly. The European Parliament gave an opinion on the Commission's Communication on the sustainable use of pesticides, which is the first step of the Thematic strategy on the sustainable use of pesticides announced in the 6th EAP. The 6th EAP aimed for a more sustainable use of pesticides and a "significant overall reduction in risks and of the use of pesticides consistent with the necessary crop protection".

The PURE campaign has reached agreement in a very short time on a proposed directive which is supported by many civil society organisations. We have also gained support for many elements of the suggested Directive from a variety of stakeholders, including the EP. As ever, the power to propose such a Directive lies with the European Commission. But the European Parliament can propose amendments as well as Member States at the Council of Ministers. In May 2002, the Parliament asked the Commission to propose a pesticide use reduction directive before July 2003, but this did not happen. There has been some dialogue: PAN Europe has commented on the Commission's statement looking forward to a "thematic strategy" on the sustainable use of pesticides⁸. The strategy was promised as part of the sixth environmental action programme (EAP) and our PURE directive should be an important part of the strategy. Now it looks as though the strategy could be published as late as Nov. 2004.

IS THERE EXPERIENCE OF REDUCING PESTICIDE USE IN EUROPE?

Yes, a number of EU member states have had pesticide use reduction programmes for more than a decade. Sweden has run one since 1986, and Denmark since 1987. Several other European countries have followed suit, with Norway and Holland starting in 1991 and Finland's voluntary programme beginning in 1993⁹. All these have achieved big reductions in pesticide use. In Sweden the sale of active ingredient dropped by 60% between 1981 – 1985 (the "reference period") and 2000; Denmark had a 59% reduction over the same time; and the Netherlands saw a 50% cut between 1984 – 1988 and 2000.

Part of this reduction in gross usage volume is due to the adoption of newer pesticides which need only be applied at very low doses. Nevertheless, the success of these government programmes do make a convincing argument for a PURE directive and setting targets and timetables. Rather than waste even more years to agree on standard risk indicators, these governments ran programmes which removed much of the exposure in the first place and hence direct as well as indirect impacts on health, environment and biodiversity. Sweden decreased pesticide residues in fruit and vegetables and reduced environmental risk by 63% and risks to human health by 77%. Denmark reduced the number of times pesticides were used by 25%, a measurable way of improving the farmland environment. These programmes have helped farmers to reduce their production costs, by cutting back on unnecessary pesticide application, while maintaining crop yield and quality. Several of these countries are now planning further programmes for reducing pesticide use and the damage it causes over the next five to ten years. What we need now is for EU-wide support for PURE,

tailored to meet the various needs of the wide range of cropping systems across the EU, including the ten Accession countries joining in 2004. This will be an important decision year for the Commission's strategy on a sustainable use of pesticides and we need as many voices as possible pushing for PURE.

PAN Europe welcomes any feedback on our PURE proposals and invites civil society organisations to join our list of signatories (for details see our website www.pan-europe.info).

References

1. Suggested text for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on measures for reduction of use and of impacts to health and environment from pesticides. PAN Europe, November 2003, third edition. Available on line at www.pan-europe.net
2. Explanatory Memorandum to the Suggested text for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on measures for reduction of use and of impacts to health and environment from pesticides. PAN Europe, November 2002. Available on line at www.pan-europe.net
3. Eurostat/NewCronos, October 2002.
4. *Environment in the EU: Environmental trends*, EEA, <http://org.eea.eu.int/documents/3-yearly/env95/en/env954en.htm>
5. Ibid. 2.
6. *Children Health and Environment: A Review of Evidence*, Environmental Issue report no.29, WHO Regional Office for Europe and European Environment Agency, Copenhagen, 2002.
7. Health and safety concerns from European survey of operators, *Pesticides News*, No. 36, June 1997.
8. Comments on the European Commission's Communication 'Towards a Thematic Strategy on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides'. PAN Europe/European Environmental Bureau, September 2002.
9. Ibid. 2.

Signatory organisations to the PURE campaign

European organisations: Coordination Paysanne Européenne (CPE); European Community of Consumer Cooperatives, (Euro-Coop); European Environmental Bureau (EEB); European Public Health Alliance - Health and Environment working group (EPHA); Friends of the Earth Europe (FoEE); Greenpeace European Office; International Friends of Nature (FNI); Pesticides Action Network Europe (PAN); Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF); World Wide Fund - European Policy Office (WWF EPO). *National organisations:*
ARMENIA Armenian Women for Health and Healthy Environment (AWHHE); **AUSTRIA** Ärztinnen und Ärzte für eine gesunde Umwelt (ISDE); GLOBAL 2000 (FoE) **BELARUS** Ecosphere; Foundation for Realization of Ideas **BELGIUM** Bond Beter Leefmilieu (BBL); Brusselse Raad voor het Leefmilieu (BRAL); Groupement d'Arboriculteurs pratiquant en Wallonie les techniques Intégrées (ASBL-GAWI); Inter-Environnement Bruxelles (IEB); Inter-Environnement Wallonie (IEW); Réseau des Consommateurs Responsables (RCR); Velt; For Mother Earth **BULGARIA** Friends of the Earth; Black Sea Centre for Environmental Information & Education (BSCEIE); Agro-Link; Foundation for Agriculture & Environment (FAE) **CYPRUS** BirdLife-Cyprus **CZECH REPUBLIC** Society for Sustainable Living **DENMARK** Danish Association for the Conservation of Nature; Forbrugerrådet (The Danish Consumer Council); Ecological Council; General Workers Union (SID); Green Families in Denmark **ESTONIA** Estonian Organic Farming Foundation **FRANCE** Alliance Isère; ARBOS BIO INFOS; Association Bretonne de Défense de l'Eau du Blavet (Blavet S.EAU.S); Association de la Côte d'émeraude pour l'Environnement et la Qualité de la Vie (ACEQV); Association Intercantonale pour une Participation Active de Tous les Citoyens à la Démocratie Locale (DIRE); Cohérence pour un Développement Durable; Comité de Liaison des Associations Pour l'Environnement du Languedoc Rousillon (CLAPE LR); Culture Bio; Fédération Rhône-Alpes de Protection de la Nature (FRAPNA-Ardeche); France Nature Environnement; Ligue pour la Préservation de la Faune Sauvage (ROC); Mouvement pour les Droits et le Respect des Generations Futures (MDRGF); Protection des Animaux de Ferme (PMAF); Protection Défense de l'Environnement de Bourg Fidèle; Réseau Association Rurale Bayonne por le Respect de l'Environnement (ARBRE); Société pour l'Etude, la Protection et l'Aménagement de la Nature dans le Sud-Ouest (SEPANSO); SOS Estuaire **GERMANY** Coalition against BAYER-Dangers (CBG); Friends of the Earth Germany (BUND); International Society of Doctors for the Environment (ISDE); PAN Germany **GREECE** Ecotopia **HUNGARY** Centre for Environmental Studies **IRELAND** Voice of Irish Concern for the Environment (VOICE) **ITALY** Legambiente **LITHUANIA** Lithuanian National Consumer Federation **LUXEMBOURG** Natura **MACEDONIA** Association of Doctors for the Environment (MADE) **NETHERLANDS** Leefmilieu; Stichting Natuur en Milieu (SNM) **NORWAY** The Bellona Foundation **POLAND** Social Ecological Institute **ROMANIA** Mama Terra (For Mother Earth) **SERBIA & MONTENEGRO** Green Network of Vojvodina **SLOVAKIA** Centre for Environmental Public Advocacy (CEPA) **SLOVENIA** Institute for Sustainable Development; Slovenian Organic Farmers Association -Central Slovenia; Union of Slovenian Organic Farmers Associations (USOFA) **SPAIN** Amigos de la Tierra (FoE); Ecologistas en Acción; Instituto Sindical de Trabajo, Ambiente y Salud (ISTAS); Asociacion Vida Sana; Centre for Analysis & Health Programmes (CAPS) **SWEDEN** Swedish Consumer Coalition; Swedish Society for Nature Conservation **SWITZERLAND** 0 Zero Discharge **UK**; Compassion in World Farming (CIWF); The Food Commission; Friends of the Earth (England, Wales & Northern Ireland); PAN UK; Rural, Agricultural and Allied Workers (TGWU); Soil Association; Welsh Food Alliance; Women's Environmental Network (WEN) **UKRAINE** Green Doctors Ukraine (ISDE); Centre of Sustainable Development & Ecological Research

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