



Pesticide Action Network

Europe

'a radical change in food consumption and production in Europe is unavoidable to meet the challenges of scarcities and to make the European agro-food system more resilient in times of increasing instability and surprise.

the SCAR 3rd Foresight report¹²

Brussels, 18 October 2011

If I have understood correctly, FAHRE has asked PAN Europe to answer four questions questions:

- what we think about your assessment of the need for more social, policy and intervention research on food and health, and
what we think on your recommendation for agencies to bring agriculture, health and research ministries together at both national and European levels

beyond that I understand that you also wish that we tell you:

- Do you agree these priorities towards research for healthy eating?
- If yes, what should be done to “make them happen”?
- If not, what else should be done for food and health research in Europe?

Though, rather than answering on your last two questions, which I am not sure to understand properly, I have instead tried to give an overview of the general statements in the text that we do/do not agree with.

If that does not correspond to what you were looking for please do not hesitate to contact me again, and I shall be pleased to answer more accurately on the exact question, later this month.

PAN Europe – who are we: Pesticide Action Network Europe (PAN Europe) is a network of NGOs organisations working to minimise negative effects and replace the use of hazardous chemicals with ecologically sound alternatives.

Our network brings together consumer, public health, and environmental organisations, women's and farm advisory groups from across 19 European countries.

¹ European Commission – Standing Committee on Agricultural Research (SCAR), The 3rd SCAR Foresight Exercise (2011) Sustainable food consumption and production in a resource-constrained world.

We work to eliminate dependency on chemical pesticides and to support safe sustainable pest control methods.

1. PAN Europe’s reaction regarding FAHRE’s assessment of the need for more social, policy and intervention research on food and health,

PAN Europe agrees with FAHRE’s statement on ‘Research in food and health in Europe has been primarily directed towards commercial concerns.’ and ‘there has been less of research on prevention and interventions’.

Though, we do not fully agree with the FAHRE recommendation that future research using public funding should address the global issue of unhealthy eating, including obesity, which causes preventable disability and disease, leading to reduced working life and increased healthcare costs. The EU target for ‘Active and Healthy Ageing’ of increasing life expectancy by two years by 2020 will be achieved more by preventing disease at younger ages than increased treatment of elderly people’.

Instead, we believe that the way forward for a EU research Policy on food and health, must start by looking at the preventative benefits that sustainable practices in farming do have.

As a result, PAN Europe proposes that the new research Policy must start by establishing a database highlighting the result from the many studies already done on the benefits of sustainable agricultural practices (crop rotation, hedges, ..), and of using non chemical alternatives (biological control agents) able to substitute pesticides usage.

This would be in line with :

The flagship initiative for a resource-efficient Europe under the Europe 2020 strategy supports the shift towards a resource-efficient, low-carbon economy to achieve sustainable growth.on resource efficiency (<http://ec.europa.eu/resource-efficient-europe/>).

EU citizens continue to consider pesticides residue levels in fruit, vegetables and cereals as their main concern regarding food related risks (special Eurobarometer 354, November 2010).

The SCAR 3rd Foresight report conclusions highlighting that *a radical change in food consumption and production in Europe is unavoidable to meet the challenges of scarcities and to make the European agro-food system more resilient in times of increasing instability and surprise.*

2. PAN Europe’s reaction regarding FAHRE’s recommendation for agencies to bring agriculture, health and research ministries together at both national and European levels.

PAN Europe agrees with FAHRE’s observation that ‘many research programmes in both food and health, usually managed by ministries of science but rarely in collaboration with ministries of health. Industry mainly contributes ‘near product’ research: few industry SMEs are engaged with food and health research, nor are civil society organisations.’

PAN Europe agrees with FAHRE recommendation to creating a EU Coordinating Research Agency, with budget and representation from the three EU directorates Agriculture, Health and Research’.

THough PAN Europe proposed also to include DG Environment into the DGs to involve, as many of the topics dealt with are of benefit to the environment.

PAN Europe also welcome the idea of involving nongovernmental stakeholders from civil society, not only in reearch discussions at EU and national levels, but propose also to enlarge collaboration to other areas.

Special Eurobarometer 354, November 2010 on food risks includes a survey on **Public confidence in sources of information on food safety**. The survey shows that EU citizens are the most confident in “their physician/doctor”, “family and friends” and then “consumer organisations” (76%), “scientists” (73%) and “**environmental protection groups**” (71%). The wide majority of Europeans feel confident about “farmers” (58%) with respect to information on food risks. These are the only actors in the food supply chain that reach a level of confidence above 50%. Results show that respondents tend to trust information from those involved in the food supply chain to a much lower degree, with about a third saying they feel confident about information from “food manufacturers” (35%) and “retailers” (36%).

3. PAN Europe’s comments to the proposed text as it stands

3.1 PAN Europe’s completely oppose to your statements

on page 8 saying:

• *Food origin, for example, if it is ‘organic’ or ‘natural’ food, doesn’t much affect health; but eating less processed food increases the range and combination of nutrients, and provides beneficial bulk.*

This is simply not true, for a clear overview of the health effect of eating natural and organic, pls see the homepage of PAN Europe and of IFOAM.

On page 12, saying

The world’s population is predicted to grow from around 7bn by 2020 to 9bn by 2050. The need to supply food to a growing and ageing world population requires food for health research to deal with a global agenda.

Instead what is should have said is : ‘if we really need to ensure long term food security by 2050, we need stop contaminating the water, the sold, stop biodiversity from halting, climate for changing, and need to focus research on how to ensure long term food security at the local level’

On page 13, saying :

‘while European surveys have described eating patterns and food consumption in all member states, there is less knowledge for sub-communities including migrants, elderly and low-income people.’

Instead it should have said ‘while European surveys have described eating patterns and food consumption in all member states, there is little knowledge on what citizens really want the food chain to deliver. Consumers, in countries like Denmark, Austria and Sweden use an increasing amount on food compared to ten years ago, could be interesting to find out why ;’

On page 19 it is stated :

Thus, European food research will focus on 'security' (production and global availability), and health is separated from 'ageing' (whereas the Innovation Partnership joins them together).

It is a shame that such an approach is taken, security should mean long term food security and regional availability.

Further it is stated :

European research should move from food 'safety' research and acute diseases to food's contribution to reducing chronic diseases, which are the greatest health threat of future years.

Instead this sentence should have also made a reference to the importance of sustainable production method (practices and biological control agents) as a key to reduce chronic diseases.

On page 25 you state :

To address the Grand Challenges of Food and Health in Europe, we need to coordinate the scattered European research and innovation efforts. The main weaknesses of food and health research at present include:

- *fragmented research capacities;*
- *lack of national strategies;*
- *low resource allocation to 'food and health' research together.*

PAN Europe would like to highlight that there is a need to identify what we already know, but need to get implemented into EU agriculture, and then from there we will be able to identify what we still need to find out, and from there focus our scarce research budget.

For ex. There is no need to start doing research to find out if crop rotation is good, instead we should use research already done in the US over a 50 years period.

On page 25 you state :

There is a lack of public health perspective in the food and health research agenda. Equally, there is no effective mechanism, at member state or EU levels, to take into account broader "global" issues in setting the research agenda.

PAN Europe is of the opinion that first priority should not be global issues, but more focus on regional issues, and that the way to address the mismanaged delivery of agro-ecological farming systems.

3.2 PAN Europe agrees with your statements

On page 12, saying :

Food for health research also has to take into account ethical considerations that balance the production of crops for food with the production of crops as renewable energy.

On page 25-26, saying :

Important progress has been made during the last decade to involve the food industry in setting a research agenda through the European Technology Platform for 'Food for Life', and in member states through food research networks or clusters. But there has not been equivalent development for civil society or "experts representing society" in the research agenda.

This lack of coordination between ministries and lack of mechanisms to involve civil society in

the research agendas has resulted in an imbalance, where the food industry perspective appears to be more represented than the public – the citizens’ – perspective

4. Conclusion

PAN Europe welcomes the statement that FAHRE *observed a particular need to increase civil society organizations (CSOs) and public bodies concerned with food and health, to ensure that the public health agenda is sufficiently taken into account, and for ‘social innovation’ to address the needs of society’ though as a result we propose that point number one regarding what kind of research we need to look into globalisation and production, are not the right target.*

Though , if the real purpose is to include civil society the topics to be discussed, and the entire organisation of identification of which research we really needs should be seen in a much bigger context, helping to ensure the needed paradigm change in agriculture, starting by :

- Increase awareness of all research projects already finalising highlighting the potential of non chemical alternatives (delivery of sustainable production methods and of biological control); and from there start identify what kind of research we still need
- taking a more regional/local approach to farming rather than a global approach ;
- recognise that production methods has a fundamental impacts of consumers (residues in the food), and bystanders (when spraying rural dwellers are concerned as are tourists, ..) health ; and
- look into the possibility of encouraging a more agroecological approach to farming.

All of us are exposed directly or indirectly to pesticides and other agrochemicals- farm workers and their families most of all, but every consumer will be exposed to dozens of different pesticides every day through food, especially worrying for young children and the unborn.

Many pesticides are known for their risk to cause cancer, change DNA or being harmful to reproduction³. For many pesticides there is good evidence for endocrine disrupting properties. The health effects of these risks (cancer, cognitive and sexual disorders, mental disorders) are rising in society⁴ and a contribution of pesticides to these effects is likely⁵. Pregnant women and children are especially vulnerable to pesticide exposure.

Pesticides are products designed to kill or repel undesired living organisms. Although each pesticide is meant to target a certain pest, most can have negative side effects on non-target species, including humans. When used in agriculture, they often contaminate the air, water, sediments, wildlife and beneficial insects (like bees and predators of insect pests), soil micro-organisms and end up in our food too.

For further information:

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³ European Parliament study PE 408.559 ,the benefits of strict cut of criteria on human health in relation to the proposal for a regulation concerning plant protection products (2008)

⁴ Theo Colborn, Environm. Health Perspect. 112 (9):944, (2004)

⁵ Theo Colborn, Environm. Health Perspect. 114 (1): 10 (2006)

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Pesticide Action Network Europe (PAN Europe) was founded in 1987 and brings together consumer, public health, and environmental organisations, trades unions, women's groups and farmer associations from across 19 European countries. PAN Europe is part of the global network PAN working to minimise the negative effects and replace the use of harmful pesticides with ecologically sound alternatives.

Number in the EU register of interested parties : 15913213485-46