

Pesticides: UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food Report:

Agrochemicals do not guarantee food safety, are toxic to health and environment

Today (8 March 2017), the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food will present a report¹ before the UN Human Rights Council on the many issues posed by pesticides. Inefficient to guarantee food safety, toxic to human health and the environment, it is part of an agricultural model that is outdated and benefits only to multinationals and trade while EU farmers struggle to survive.

In the last years, scientific as well as field-based information concerning the dead-end that represents our current agricultural model is thriving. This UN report provides an extra dimension to the issue of pesticides that has been little documented by officials: the political one. Indeed, as PAN Europe observe in the EU institutions, the pesticides industry is spending millions of euros² lobbying for maintaining their toxic products on the market. Very often, they provide false information to decision makers and scare people with fancy figures such as an 85% yield loss without pesticides and play with the fear of hunger.

These last years, independent science let little doubt on the usefulness of pesticides for humanity. The yield difference between conventional and high-level organic farming is only 8 to 9%, compared to the more than 30% of the food we waste every year³. Furthermore, the cost of externalities has been shown to outweigh the benefits pesticides might provide⁴. No later than last week, French INRA scientists calculated that without any change in the cropping system, French farmers could already cut their use of pesticides by 30% without any yield loss⁵.

"We are pleased that the UN special rapporteur on right to food confirms what the PAN network denounces for decades: pesticide use has nothing to do with food safety. They are intended to increase profits of multinationals and keep our farmers prisoners in a highly polluting system that produces low quality food and intoxicate operators, bystanders, consumers and the environment. The story keeps repeating: pesticides are shown as revolutionary and then are banned because of their toxicity: organochlorines (DDT), organophosphates have been massively used and then banned. Now science points at neonicotinoids and pyrethroids because of their toxicity to bees and humans. Pesticides lead to a dead-end that is maintained through pressures by the industry on decision-makers. In the meantime, EU citizens are daily exposed to these chemicals⁶. In the more specific EU debate on glyphosate, we can clearly observe the influence from the industry that is highlighted in this report and that impedes a better protection of our health and environment" said Martin Dermine from PAN Europe.

Angeliki Lyssimachou, PAN Europe's ecotoxicologist added *"On pesticide safety, the EU has a better situation than the rest of the world but the situation is very far from being ideal: the precautionary*

¹ <http://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?Open&DS=A/HRC/34/48&Lang=E>

² <http://www.pan-europe.info/press-releases/2016/11/another-inconvenient-truth-pesticides-companies-flood-eu-institutions-paying>

³ Diversification practices reduce organic to conventional yield gap. Ponisio LC, M'Gonigle LK, Mace KC, Palomino J, de Valpine P, Kremen C. Proc Biol Sci. 2015 Jan 22;282(1799):20141396.

⁴ The Hidden and External Costs of Pesticide Use. Denis Bourguet and Thomas Guillemaud. Chapter 2 E. Lichtfouse (ed.), *Sustainable Agriculture Reviews*, 2016, Sustainable Agriculture Reviews 19, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-26777-7_2

⁵ Reducing pesticide use while preserving crop productivity and profitability on arable farms. Lechenet M, Dessaint F, Py G, Makowski D, Munier-Jolain N. Nat Plants. 2017 Mar 1;3:17008. doi: 10.1038/nplants.2017.8.

⁶ <http://www.pan-europe.info/campaigns/voices-pesticides-around-europe>

principle is something theoretical that is used in very rare occasions. The glyphosate example is very explicit in this regards: the UN International Agency on Research on Cancer (IARC) classified glyphosate as a probable carcinogenic in 2015, taking into account the toxicity of the full product, including co-formulants (roundup). In 2015, the European Food Safety Authority, by assessing the active ingredient alone (glyphosate), concluded the substance was safe. This is a major loophole in the EU safety against the harm of pesticides our regulators shut their eyes on! The European Chemical Agency might release its classification on the carcinogenicity of glyphosate today. We hope, for the sake of our health and the environment that the Agency to follow IARC's opinion, which is based on publicly available scientific data".

Contacts: Martin Dermine: +32 (0) 486 32 99 92, martin@pan-europe.info