



Brussels, 20th of July 2023

To: Spanish ministers of agriculture, environment and health

Subject: Sustainable Use of Pesticides Regulation (SUR) - IPM and crop-specific rules

Dear Minister,

In view of the agenda of the EU Agriculture and Fisheries Council on 25th of July 2023, we would like to share our views regarding both the need for constructive progress on the Sustainable use of Pesticides Regulation (SUR) and the need to stand firmly behind the core provisions of the Commission SUR proposal.

On 5th of July 2023 the Commission published a study complementing the impact assessment of the SUR proposal, as requested by the Council. The study confirms that a well-managed transition to decreased pesticide dependency won't entail negative effects for food availability. The transition period until 2030 provides time for implementation and a well-guided transition. On the contrary, the study as well as the scientific community underline that the climate and biodiversity crises, soil and landscape degradation and the associated loss of ecosystem services represent serious risks for food security. Europe is and has been facing extreme weather events, leading to substantial drops in yields, with ministers asking financial support for impacted farmers. Periods of water shortage are alternating with periods of severe flooding, with far-reaching consequences for agriculture and livelihoods. At the same time, there is a wide scientific consensus that pollinators are essential to food security and are severely affected by pesticide use. Natural pest control is responsible for at least 50% of pest control in crop fields, and fully depends on a rich and resilient biodiversity. More than 60% of EU soils are classified as unhealthy, mainly due to soil pollution and loss of soil biodiversity.

Pesticide use has also negative impacts on human health. Farmers, workers, operators, bystanders and inhabitants of agricultural areas are particularly exposed to pesticides. Pesticide exposure has been linked to increased risks of several illnesses.

The SUR is essential to transition towards healthy, sustainable, nature-friendly food systems and to protect and restore ecosystems' functioning, which are prerequisites for long term food security. For the SUR to lead to the urgently needed and effective changes in practice, it is pivotal that the key provisions of the proposal are preserved and strengthened where needed.

1. Lack of implementation and impact of the SUD

Although the Directive on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides (dir. (EC) 128/2009, SUD) made IPM mandatory in the EU since 2014, multiple analyses by EU bodies¹ confirm the lack of implementation of IPM since then. Different analyses underlined the weaknesses in the Directive and the lack of ambition in the National Action Plans (NAPs), as well as the lack of national targets and the need to protect sensitive areas. The lack of mandatory IPM and pesticide reduction objectives have been identified as the main reason for the lack of implementation of this Directive. **Practice demonstrates that without setting mandatory crop-specific rules, the needed transition to a full implementation of IPM will not occur.** The aim of the Commission's SUR proposal is to tackle the lack of implementation of IPM, given the urgency to address health impacts related to pesticide use, the need to transition to resilient food-production systems and to restore the ecosystem services they depend on.

2. IPM and Crop-specific rules

Hence, it is with great concern that we established that the IPM compromise chapter drafted under the Swedish Presidency severely waters down key provisions on IPM. Annuling directly binding crop-specific rules, making them merely an option for MS, would abolish a crucial provision of the SUR proposal. **Effective and enforceable IPM crop-specific rules for at least 90% of the utilised agricultural area are a prerequisite for the SUR to lead to effective changes in agricultural practices.** Creating a legally binding framework is necessary to create a level playing field and make sure that all Member States play their part in ensuring a sustainable future for their farmers, while reducing pesticide use and protecting farmers' and other citizens' health, as well as the environment.

Preserving a clear framework with binding crop-specific rules is **also needed to ensure that farmers can be eligible for receiving financial support while transitioning to full implementation of IPM through CAP funds.**

Crop-specific rules will have to be well designed and based on best available practices, providing a practical, user-friendly framework to support farmers to effectively implement IPM. Every year more chemical pesticides are banned because of their excessive toxicity to health and the environment. By proposing not making IPM mandatory with enforceable crop-specific rules, the council would prevent farmers from gradually adapting to the decrease of chemical pesticides and chemical diversity.

IPM, as well as practices that cannot be considered IPM, should be well defined. The SUR must clearly define that all steps of IPM need to be applied, not merely considered. It is also essential that clear reporting on IPM practices remains mandatory, to allow for transparency, data gathering and effective monitoring of progress. The different IPM steps entail preventative agronomic practices (crop rotation, resistant varieties, enhancement of functional biodiversity,

¹ *Implementation assessment on SUD by the [European Parliamentary Research Service](#) (2018)*
Report on the SUD of the [European Commission](#) (2020)
Report on the SUD of the [European Court of Auditors](#) (2020)

...) (1), monitoring, forecasting and warning systems (2), mechanical, physical and natural control (3), before using biocontrol when needed, or, as last resort, if all other options have failed and economical thresholds are exceeded, chemical pesticides. In annex to this letter, we provide you with our feedback on the proposal, which also includes a description of practices that can not be considered IPM (e.g. prophylactic use of pesticides, calendar-based spraying).

Increasing functional biodiversity at both farm and landscape level, a key element of IPM, is needed to establish, maintain and restore biodiversity. Indeed, protecting and enhancing beneficial organisms and plants, supplying ecosystem services will help mitigating and adapting to climate change, stabilising the microclimate, reduce erosion, support pollination and natural pest control and improve water quantity and quality. The incorporation of high diversity landscape features covering at least 10% of UAA, a key objective of the Biodiversity strategy, is therefore pivotal to transition to resilient, long-term profitable agricultural systems.

It is important to acknowledge that IPM already provides an effective alternative to pesticides today. A wide variety of IPM, agro-ecology and organic systems across Europe, as well as many research projects^{2,3}, point at the far reaching potential of IPM in increasing resilience of agricultural systems and decreasing dependency on agrochemicals. Other valuable alternatives, such as **biocontrol, can only be fully effective if combined with IPM practices** including biodiversity restoration, increasing the overall resilience of agricultural systems, which is in general an urgent prerequisite to decrease vulnerability of cropping systems to pests and extreme weather events.

3. CAP and Financial support

CAP funds, amounting to about 1/3 of the EU budget, should be used to support farmers in the transition towards agroecological practices. Budget has been foreseen in the CAP funds, as well as provisions in the CAP strategic plans regulation (impact indicator 18, result indicator 24, context indicator 49) , to support farmers to implement IPM and reduce pesticide use. Through eco-schemes under pillar 1, as well as agri-environment climate measures under pillar 2, funds can be used to support farmers in implementing IPM and decreasing pesticide use. Pillar 2 can also provide funds for investment in equipment and training, and cover insurances for losses of income when transitioning to IPM.

The provisions in the SUR proposal to allocate financial support of CAP funds during a 5-year period to implement requirements of the SUR legislation, require **crop-specific rules** to ensure that farmers can be eligible for receiving financial support through the CAP funds. **When member states insist on replacing crop-specific rules by merely guidelines, and removing the provisions on CAP funding options in the proposal, they prevent farmers from receiving support to make the shift to implementation of IPM.** Member states can update their national strategic plans every year, and hence make changes in their set of measures and the allocation of funds. When CAP funds are not spent, funds flow back, leading to missed opportunities to support farmers to shift to sustainable practices.

² [van der Ploeg et al., 2019](#). The economic potential of agroecology: Empirical evidence from Europe

³ [IDDRI, 2018](#). An agroecological Europe in 2050: multifunctional agriculture for healthy eating

Since 2015, the CAP also makes it mandatory for Member States to have Farm Advisory Services, which, since 2015, need to be competent to advise farmers about IPM. An essential future step is to ensure independence of advisory services.

The CAP Strategic Plans regulation post-2027 will also need to further integrate the SUR in the relevant articles, by also including obligations of the SUR in the **conditionality** and in the specific objectives of the post-2027 CAP.

Also a EU-wide pesticide tax can contribute, through application of the polluter pays principle, to cover the environmental and health impacts of pesticide use, and for carrying out obligations under the SUR regulation.

4. Buffer zones

Farmers, farmworkers and inhabitants of agricultural areas are at particular risk of adverse health impacts by pesticides^{4,5}, with data showing higher concentrations of pesticides in their blood and increased genotoxicity. Pesticides are shown to **drift over far distances**, up to several kms. People and animals are impacted through different exposure routes (inhalation, ingestion, dermal absorption, indoor dust, ...). Just recently, a mother and son in Spain passed away following exposure to pesticides used on the farm next to their house. Links have been shown between pesticide exposure and **many illnesses**, such as forms of cancers (e.g. Non-Hodgkin lymphoma, multiple myeloma, skin melanoma, ovarian, breast, brain, lip and prostate cancers) and neurodegenerative disorders (Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease). Parkinson's is recognised as an occupational disease in France and Italy. Many pesticides have endocrine disrupting characteristics, interfering with natural hormones, and **even at low doses** affecting normal development and function of multiple organs⁶. Studies show that '**protective equipments**' do not adequately protect farmers from harmful exposure. Particularly vulnerable are also **women and children**, with pesticide exposure related to disturbances of the reproductive system^{7,8}, fertility disorders as well as neurodevelopmental alterations in newborns. Even low levels of pesticide exposure can interfere with the neurological and behavioural development of children (neonatal reflexes, psychomotor and mental development and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder)⁹.

At the same time, given the **dramatic decline in biodiversity as well as the high level of pesticide pollution in water bodies and other ecosystems, both associated with very high societal costs**, protective buffer zones around nature areas and water courses are needed to protect our environment and biodiversity.

For buffer zones to provide a relevant level of protection for sensitive areas, they should be as wide as possible, with a width of at least 100m.

⁴ [Figueiredo et al., 2019](#). Spatio-temporal variation of outdoor and indoor pesticide air concentrations in homes near agricultural fields

⁵ [Dereumeaux et al., 2020](#). Pesticide exposures for residents living close to agricultural lands: A review

⁶ [EEA, 2023](#). How pesticides impact human health and ecosystems in Europe

⁷ [Bretveld et al., 2006](#). Pesticide exposure: the hormonal function of the female reproductive system disrupted?

⁸ [Farr et al., 2004](#). Pesticide use and menstrual cycle characteristics among premenopausal women in the Agricultural Health Study,

⁹ [Liu et al., 2012](#). Pesticide exposure and child neurodevelopment: summary and implications

5. Indicators

The Harmonised Risk Indicator 1 (HRI) to calculate progress towards the pesticide reduction targets is fundamentally flawed. As the methodology is based on quantities, without a link with the application rate/ha, risk of particularly toxic substances is heavily underestimated, while the risk of less harmful substances, that are used in larger quantities, is greatly overestimated. Moreover, in the current methodology, the banning or expiring of an active substance leads to an unreasonable high influence on the overall risk of the HRI1, due to the high risk weighting factor (WF) of 64 given to substances that are banned¹⁰, while the categories don't allow for adequate diversification in risk of active substances¹¹. The indicator must therefore be timely replaced by a simple and robust indicator, accounting for the application rate/ha and indicating only effective reductions in the use and/or risk of pesticides. The SUR should also provide for the development and eventual adoption of science-based risk indicators, based on ecotoxicity data and use data, to calculate and monitor trends in the ecological/environmental impact of pesticide use on different groups of organisms. In this regard, PAN Europe has suggested to include among more the TAT (Total Applied Toxicity) indicator. It is important that the pesticide indicators are systematically reviewed, in order to update them as needed according to progressive insights.

We were informed that a very limited number of meetings has been assigned to work on the SUR proposal - only 4, compared to 16 meetings allocated for the work on NGTs. We, therefore, would like to ask to increase the number of meetings allocated to the SUR proposal, a file of very high relevance to EU citizens.

We would also like to take this opportunity to request a (digital) meeting with you to discuss and exchange thoughts on key elements of the SUR. Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Yours sincerely,

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¹⁰ A special higher weighting factor of 64 is given for banned active substances, a posteriori giving the impression that the use and risk has strongly decreased, because the substance's weighting factor has increased through the change in category.

¹¹ The 4 categories of active substances (AS) used for calculation of the HRI (*low-risk AS (WF1), all other approved AS (WF8), candidates for substitution AS (WF16), not approved AS (WF64)*) don't allow for a robust, science-based weighting of the various levels of toxicity of different AS. For example, a very large group of substances belongs to the 2nd class, while these substances have a wide variety of different levels of toxicity. At the same time, under the 'not approved' substances can be, for example, low-risk substances waiting for reapproval, which then still receive the high weighting factor of 64.