

Brussels, 1 March 2023

Stop blocking the SUR and enter into constructive negotiations!



Dear Chairman of the AGRI Committee, Norbert Lins,

The scientific community is largely in agreement, its warnings more startling than ever: We are currently facing *“the largest loss of life since dinosaurs – one million plant and animal species are threatened with extinction – some within decades.”* [Scientists stated](#) this at COP 15 in December 2022 in Montreal. And this warning is in addition to the [alarming finding](#) of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) that *“the biodiversity that underpins our food systems is disappearing, putting the future of our food, livelihoods, health and environment under severe threat.”*

The current European mainstream agricultural system relies on chemical fertilisers and toxic pesticides and puts farmers and agricultural workers under pressure, compromising both their health and their socio-economic position. Farmers' and bystanders' exposure to pesticides is now [clearly linked](#) to chronic diseases such as cancer, Alzheimer and Parkinson's disease, as well as infertility. Increased health risks, declining social recognition and fluctuating low market prices contribute to the fact that every three minutes a farm in the EU closes its doors forever. [Data shows](#) that there is a direct link between the [decreasing income](#) for farmers (down 46% from 2000 to 2020) and the [sharp increase](#) of prices for [inputs like pesticides and fertilisers](#). The diverse small-scale agriculture that characterises many rural areas in Europe is [increasingly disappearing](#) from the landscape.

Addressing these challenges requires a bundle of measures as envisioned in the [EU Farm to Fork](#) and Biodiversity Strategies. Among the most advanced of these envisaged policies is the proposal for a regulation on the sustainable use of pesticides (SUR). A draft parliament report will be presented by the rapporteur Sarah Wiener in tomorrow's Environment Committee meeting.

In this context we - the initiators of the successful European Citizens' Initiative "Save Bees and Farmers" - are very concerned about delays of the political process on the SUR; delays that are currently caused by the Parliaments Agriculture committee's chair and (shadow) rapporteurs, basing their position on the Council's demand for supplementary data.

With all due respect for the independence of your mandate and the fundamental complexity of political decisions, we find it problematic that you, as chair of the Agriculture Committee, [asked](#) the European Commission to withdraw the SUR-proposal, while at the same time fighting to obtain shared competence with ENVI on the proposal, only to now [declare](#) that the Agriculture Committee would *“consider irrelevant giving an opinion on the proposal when the additional impact assessment is pending.”*

It is worrying that the European Parliament would be unable to adopt a reasonable timetable for decision-making and voting on the SUR, because some of its members are trying to delay and derail the dossier by using the war in Ukraine as a pretext. In the face of the accelerating climate and biodiversity crisis and the worrying state of Europe's diverse and family farming, such a delay in the policy making process is irresponsible and dangerous. It disregards the will of the vast majority of Europeans to significantly reduce pesticide use, as the [Conference for the Future of Europe](#) and various [Eurobarometer surveys](#) have shown. It also disregards a broad consensus in the scientific community.

More than [660 scientists](#) warned shortly after the outbreak of war in Ukraine that “*political efforts to abandon the sustainability targets of the Farm to Fork strategy (including pesticide use) do not shield us from the current crisis, they rather worsen it and make the crisis permanent.*” But this did not stop a [group](#) of Member States from calling for a “*complementary impact assessment*” using the war as an argument. Again, this prompted more than [730 scientists](#) to explain that “*the long-term challenges for the EU food system and the state of biodiversity have not changed since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine*”. The knowledge gained from an additional impact assessment was and remains highly questionable.

EU policy that goes against both, the will of citizens and scientific consensus, is not the right way to maintain the trust of constituents and is at odds with the undisputed need for science-based policies in the European Union. Commissioner for Values and Transparency Věra Jourová recently [stated](#) in the European Parliament plenary that the “*trust of EU citizens in the EU Institutions is decreasing*” and *plainly said “we are doing something wrong.”*

On the occasion of tomorrow's presentation of the Parliament's draft report to the ENVI Committee, we appeal to you, on behalf of the 1.1 million European citizens who have supported our initiative:

Enter into constructive negotiations to enable and support the much-needed transition to a more sustainable food system that benefits farmers, citizens and nature alike, rather than continuing to stand in the way of the SUR. We respectfully ask you to provide a timetable for the decision-making process in the Agriculture Committee that allows for constructive cooperation with the Environment Committee and a vote before the summer break.

The envisaged transition to biodiversity-friendly agriculture and a sustainable food system is a prerequisite for long-term food security, as well as for the livelihood of thousands of European farmers. Let us take this path in a level-headed and courageous way.

With kind regards,

Helmut Burtscher-Schaden

(on behalf of the Citizens' Committee of the ECI *Save Bees and Farmers**)

* “*Save Bees and Farmers*” was supported by more than [200 NGOs](#) across Europe and signed by [1.1 million citizens](#)