

October 24 ENVI Committee vote on Pesticides Regulation SUR Citizens and Scientists are concerned and ask for high ambition

Members of the European Parliament's Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) have a fundamental choice to make: will they support an ambitious regulation on the use of pesticides, as urgently asked for by citizens and science, or will their vote echo the agro-chemical industry? A recent survey by market research agency Ipsos and published by the Pesticides Action Network (PAN) Europe again assures: EU citizens don't want policy-makers to take risks when it comes to pesticides. They are in favour of binding and protective measures.

Next week members of the ENVI Committee of the European parliament will vote on the proposal for a Sustainable Use of Pesticides regulation (SUR). A lot is at stake: the regulation could have urgently needed, far-reaching positive impacts on citizens' and farmers' health, ecosystem functioning and the resilience and sustainability of agricultural systems. This will depend on the outcome of the vote, first in the ENVI committee, next the plenary vote in the Parliament and the final text after trilogue with commission and EU Member States.

Citizens have repeatedly called for ambitious pesticide legislation and sustainable agricultural practices¹. Their concerns have been firmly supported by the scientific community, which warns about the detrimental impacts of pesticides on human health, biodiversity, ecosystem functioning and long-term production capacity². Recently, again 6000 scientists expressed their support for a strong Sustainable Use of Pesticides Regulation (SUR) and Nature Restoration Law³.

In stark contrast, many members of the parliament and the council have attempted to water down the SUR proposal, and strip it from its key provisions. Binding provisions on Integrated Pest Management (IPM)⁴, crop-specific rules and EU wide and national reduction targets, cornerstones of the proposal, have faced large opposition. Provisions on sensitive areas and buffer zones, essential to protecting citizens' health, biodiversity and water quality, are at risk of losing their purpose. The [current proposed indicator](#) to measure progress towards reduction targets is highly unfit for purpose and misleading.

This while the purpose of the SUR is to tackle the shortcomings of the current Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive (SUD). Due to the lack of directly nationally binding targets and rules, the directive has not led to effective changes in and beyond European fields. Although the SUD made IPM mandatory since 2014, enforcement in EU countries has been very weak or non-existent.

The AGRI committee vote on 9th of October supported the deletion of article 43 from the proposal. This article, on which AGRI has exclusive competences, foresees the support for farmers during a 5-year transition period, to help them comply with SUR requirements. Over 30% of EU budget is used for the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). These public funds should be used to help farmers reduce pesticide, decrease current dependency on the agroindustry, and switch to practices which maintain and restore common goods and ecosystem functioning. The recent OECD report on [policies for the future of farming and food in the EU](#), concludes "a gap between policy ambitions on environmental sustainability and observable results". [One of the main solutions in this context is the CAP, finds OECD, which needs a fundamental "reorientation" to tie it more strongly to "stated priorities and address disincentives"](#). A larger share of the money should be dedicated to "remunerating public goods" such as environmental and climate protection. "The CAP is not just loads of money, it is a tool to implement the regulations that are already in place. If you want to align the CAP with the European Green Deal, you want to make sure that all the regulations behind it are also aligned with the target." said Francesco Vanni (OECD) in Politico's Agri & Food Europe of 18th of October. Civil society organisations [have urged for the article to be maintained](#), and hope it finds the needed support during the plenary vote in November.

Pesticide Action Network (PAN Europe) is a network of NGOs working to reduce the use of hazardous pesticides and have them replaced with ecologically sound alternatives. We work to eliminate dependency on chemical pesticides and to support safe sustainable pest control methods. Our network brings together over 45 consumer, public health and environmental organisations and women's groups from across Europe.



Press Release

A [recent poll](#) carried out by Ipsos in Denmark, France, Germany, Poland, Romania and Spain and published by PAN Europe, again shows the outspoken support of citizens for ambitious pesticide policies, with high agreement across the different member states. As many as 81,8% of respondents are concerned about the environmental impact of pesticide use, while 75,9% are worried about the impact of pesticides on their and their families health.

A clear majority of respondents find that farmers should always use methods of preventing and controlling pesticides, or otherwise lose access to EU financial support. Most respondents (73,2%) find that Integrated Pest Management (IPM) rules should be mandatory for farmers in the EU.

Citizens also expressed a clear preference for large buffer zones around areas where pesticides are used and sensitive areas such as schools, kindergartens, places where people live, nature-protected areas and water bodies: the most preferred choices were the largest options provided by the survey: 41,8% chose for 1000 meters or 3000 meters buffer zones, while in total 78,8% respondents choose for a buffer of at least 50 meters or more. NGO's have been advocating for at least 50-150 meters. The distance between what citizens ask and the European Commission and many MEPs propose is wide: the SUR proposal mentions 3m buffer zones: a width far too narrow to provide any protection to citizens and biodiversity, given the scientific evidence on much larger distances over which pesticides travel through air and dust (5).

In general, citizens indicated to support the precautionary principle: 85,3% of respondents find that the use of a specific pesticide should be halted if scientific evidence emerges which indicates that the pesticide may cause harm to human health and/or the environment, until more is known.

Natalija Svrtan of PAN Europe said: "The poll shows clearly that most EU citizens from 6 member states across Europe have strong concerns about risks to food, health and the environment related to pesticide use. They express strong support for a precautionary approach and a high level of protection."

Recent research by [DeSmog](#) showed that MEPs who have been heavily opposing an effective SUR have been in constant contact with lobby groups representing the agro-chemical industry, and have been echoing the exact same claims. The deep ties between Big Ag and a group of MEPs was visualised [in a map](#) DeSmog published on 18th of October.


Kristine De Schamphelaere of PAN Europe said: 'Citizens and science call for ambitious pesticide use rules and reductions. They should inspire policy-makers when working and voting on this file, rather than the agro-chemical industry. Citizens expect policy-makers to represent the public interest, to protect human health, ecosystems and the livability of agricultural areas, for these and future generations'.

Civil society organisations have gathered essential demands for an effective SUR [in a joint statement](#).

Download the full citizens' survey report [here](#).

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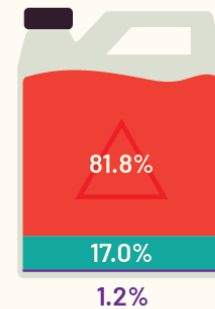
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Press Release

How concerned, if at all, are you about
**environmental impact of pesticides use in
farming and food production**

■ Very/fairly concerned
■ Not very/not at all concerned
■ N/A or DK



Source: [Report IPSOS Poll- Play it safe](#)

Notes:

- (1) In the [EU public consultation on the Common Agricultural Policy in 2017](#) respondents showed a concern for environmental challenges, such as the prevention of biodiversity loss and prevention and reduction of water pollution (pesticides, fertilisers). Also in 2017, more than 1 million citizens asked the European Commission and the Member States, through a successful [ECI, for a ban on glyphosate](#). The [final report of the Conference for the Future of Europe](#) (2022) included the need to drastically reduce pesticide use. The 2022 [Eurobarometer survey on Food safety](#) in the EU listed pesticide residues in food as the most frequently selected concern related to food safety. In 2022, over 1 million citizens raised their voice again, through the [ECI 'Save Bees and Farmers'](#), for phasing out 80% of pesticides by 2030 and 100% by 2035. Of the 9 successful ECIs that have been submitted to the European Commission, 2 were focused on pesticides.
- (2) In 2022, [668 scientists](#) warned 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”. Soon after, [739 scientists](#) called for an ambitious Sustainable Use of Pesticides Regulation, as “The heavy use of pesticides in agriculture is strongly linked to declines in insects, birds, biodiversity in terrestrial and aquatic systems and detrimental impacts on global public health”.
- (3) Recently, [6,000 scientists](#) expressed their support for the EU's Green Deal, and rejected the arguments against the Sustainable Use of Pesticides Regulation and the Nature Restoration Law. They highlight that restoring nature and reducing the use of agrochemicals is essential for maintaining long-term production capacity and enhancing food security.
- (4) [Integrated Pest Management \(IPM\)](#) is a set of rules aimed at preventing pests or diseases in plants and reducing the need for pesticides. Under these rules, pesticides are used only as a last resort, if needed, after all other measures have been tried. IPM is already mandatory since 2014, but it is not enforced by EU countries.
- (5) [Linhart et al. 2019. Pesticide contamination and associated risk factors at public playgrounds near intensively managed apple and wine orchards](#)

[Brühl et al. 2021. Direct pesticide exposure of insects in nature conservation areas in Germany](#)

[The sprint towards a sustainable future - Wageningen University](#)

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