



14th December 2010

Commissioner John Dalli
European Commission
DG Health and Consumers
B-1049 Brussels

Re: EU Commission priority for pesticide reduction and better guidance for EU Member States implementation of National Action Plans

Dear Commissioner Dalli,

Today, 14th December, marks the date for crucial deadlines in the implementation of the Directive 2009/128/EC establishing a framework for Community action to achieve the sustainable use of pesticides. By one year from now, on 14 December 2011, Member States have to bring the directive into accordance with their national law (article 23), and by 14 December 2012 have to communicate their National Action Plan to the Commission and to other EU Member States (article 4.2).

With the new Barroso Commission, the responsibility for the Directive on the sustainable use now lies with yourself and your services. The Directive represents a major opportunity to achieve significant public health gains by encouraging pesticide dependency reduction in agriculture as well as urban spaces.

Health and Environment Alliance HEAL and Pesticides Action Network PAN Europe would like to encourage you to make pesticides dependency reductions one of your priorities in 2011.

Minimising our dependency on pesticides and working with non-chemical alternatives are major public health issues. There is a growing body of science which shows the link between pesticides exposure and ill-health, particularly for pregnant women and farmers. Health care costs continue to be dominated by chronic disease, which are at least partly linked to pesticides and chemicals exposure. Therefore, an effective implementation of the new pesticides law will bring major public health benefits.

A discussion on health gains due to pesticide dependency reduction is not yet taking place in the public realm, and greater awareness could also be helpful in EU member states administrations. Yet, the issue of potential health impacts of pesticides is of continuous concern to European citizens. As a recent Eurobarometer showed, pesticide residues in food are the top concern of all food scares, and this has held true in both the 2006 and the 2010 surveys (72% of respondents are concerned). Europeans are also concerned about hazards from pesticide use in their home. A 2009 Eurobarometer on chemicals in consumer products revealed that pesticides and herbicides for home use (in gardens and greenhouses) are the top concern for Europeans (70% of respondents are concerned). Europe's citizens expect their political leaders to act on these health threats, and they support ambitious measures.

As we continue to consistently monitor EU Member States activities on the National Action Plans, we have become increasingly concerned with the slow and uneven implementation of the Directive in the EU, and the inadequate lack of any EU initiative which would facilitate and stimulate member states and regions to take action. Our feedback from many member states includes suggestions to receive guidance or even more important inspiration on “how” to go about reducing pesticides, and to develop national action plans with civil society, particularly with an increased participation of health and medical groups in this process. This involvement of all stakeholders can greatly enrich the public health debate (See for example the recent testimonies from cancer patients about their concerns of environmental causes of cancer: http://www.env-health.org/IMG/pdf/Living_Downstream_Questions_on_cancer_and_environment.pdf)

PAN Europe recently developed a best practice NAP with examples of what is already being done in many member states (http://www.pan-europe.info/Resources/Reports/NAP_best_practice.pdf) and we follow this up regularly with adding more details. We also arrange meetings allowing stakeholders to exchange experience at practical level, identify problems and solutions, and together discuss ways forward. As part of its Sick of Pesticides campaign in 5 countries, HEAL is currently collecting examples of which cities and regions in Europe have already gone pesticide-free (www.pesticidescancer.eu) and working to raise public awareness about countries implementation commitments in this directive and their link to health.

Given the public concern about health impacts of pesticides and your mandate in this area, we would like to encourage you to show leadership and prioritise this dossier in 2011. As a first step, DG SANCO could increase public awareness through a specific section on its Health Portal dedicated to Pesticides, Health and NAPs.

As the EU Commissioner for both public health and consumers, your role could be visionary in showing how a NAP targeted both at the environment and human health protection is an opportunity to showcase “health in all policies”, as highlighted in the DGSANCO video launched earlier this year during the EU Health Forum. A serious NAP, with quantitative targets and timetables, is essential for swift and effective implementation of the directive. Ambitious NAPs are needed in order to guarantee for all Europeans the same level of health protection, especially for vulnerable groups.

Underscoring the importance of pesticide reduction for public health can also increase awareness for public health issues in other EU policy fields, for example with the discussion on the 2020 Strategy and resource efficiency, as well as the Common Agricultural Policy reform and putting public health at the centre of sustainable food production.

We would appreciate the opportunity to have a meeting with you and your cabinet and services to discuss further how our organisations and European citizens concerns for better public information, and greater EU guidance could be translated to stimulate and encourage front running member states and regions with the sustainable use of pesticides in order to achieve better health protection for all.

Best regards,

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