



**Pesticide
Action
Network**
Europe

*'The transition to sustainability presents a 'first mover' opportunity for all actors in the EU food chain'
Farm to Fork (F2F)*

PAN Europe's position on the evaluation of the EU agricultural promotion policy (1)

PAN Europe proposes that the Commission aligns the EU promotion of agricultural products with the European Green Deal, therefore focusing on the promotion of circular and sustainable models rather than on competitiveness, with a special focus on pesticide use reductions. Below we explain how.

The European Commission's promotion programme should be suspended until sustainability criteria are fully integrated

While PAN Europe and its members fully recognise the potential of diversification as a marketing tool, we believe that an EU policy solely focussed on a competitiveness objective should be withdrawn with the publication of the European Green Deal, which aims at mapping *'a new, sustainable and inclusive growth strategy to boost the economy, improve people's health and quality of life, care for nature, and leave no one behind.'*

PAN Europe and its members oppose the standardised approach currently being used in the EU's promotion programme, according to which just because something is from Europe, it's good. We remind readers that there are [pesticide residues also in European food](#) and that [European annual pesticide sales](#) remain stable at around 400,000 tonnes of active substances; moreover, there are huge differences between how farmers use pesticides and the production methods they apply, making these large scale generalisations erroneous.

We point to the fact that one of the few positive aspects of the COVID-19 lockdown has been that people have started paying more attention to food. The consumption of organic agriculture has increased significantly, people are preparing and cooking their own food more, and citizens are increasingly looking to nature-based solutions for positive experiences. For instance, 78 000 Danes followed online when Danish organic dairy farmers let their cows graze outside this spring, with happy heifers jumping around. So, we should use this moment to zoom in on farming and work with nature.

The EU promotion programme must stop offering support to conventional agricultural products for export

In these COVID-19 times, spending another 200 million EUR of European citizens' taxpayer money to pay agri-business up to 80% compensation for promoting the export of conventional agricultural products around the world seems simply inappropriate. Instead, we should focus

on obtaining increased transparency in the European food chain (business to consumer), and better and more localised links between farmers and consumers. Doing so will not only help European citizens make better consumer choices, it could also be a way to help kick off the recovery in parts of the sector which suffered enormously from the COVID-19 crisis, such as tourism.

PAN Europe and its members find that it would be most appropriate to stop offering support for promotion of exports; therefore, we call on the European Commission to, as from 2021, start selecting products from a pesticide use reduction angle, and in the coming years only allow pesticide-free front runners to be part of the programme.

The EU promotion policy must put pesticide use up front in promoting another model of farming

One of the key objectives of the F2F is to reduce pesticide use and risk by 50% by 2030; this needs to be carried out by farmers in order to apply Integrated Pest Management (IPM):

According to the F2F Strategy: *“IPM will encourage the use of alternative control techniques, such as crop rotation and mechanical weeding, and will be one of the main tools in reducing the use of, and dependency on, chemical pesticides in general, and the use of more hazardous pesticides in particular.”*

The EU should encourage a **‘non-toxic business model’**. The reason for this is clearly identified in the F2F Strategy, as follows: *“The transition to sustainable food systems is also a **huge economic opportunity**. Citizens’ expectations are evolving and driving significant change in the food market. This is an opportunity for farmers, fishers and aquaculture producers, as well as food processors and food services. This transition will allow them to make sustainability their trademark and to guarantee the future of the EU food chain before their competitors outside the EU do so. The transition to sustainability presents a ‘first mover’ opportunity for all actors in the EU food chain.”*

This is also what citizens want: The issue of presence of residues of chemicals in food is of special interest to European citizens. Again and again, pesticide residues found in fruit, vegetables or cereal are the number one concern around ‘food related risks’ in regular surveys conducted by the [European Food Barometers](#).

But the food-related risks of pesticide residues are also of increasing interest to consumers outside of Europe. [A study from December 2014](#) shows for instance that the Chinese are worried about all food-related hazards, including food containing pesticides or veterinary drug residues, and, as China is one of the main growing destinations, that seems a relevant aspect to consider.

Example of how the Danish pesticide reduction model is supported by all actors:

Denmark’s over 30 years-old pesticide reduction policy is one of the reasons why Danish fruit and vegetables have lower levels of pesticide residues. The Danish consumer organisation [Forbrugerradet](#) recognises this and therefore echoes the [Danish authorities’](#) call for Danish consumers to choose Danish-produced fruit and vegetables over European ones, while only choosing imported products as a last resort.

The EU quality labels on agricultural products should focus on pesticide use reductions

It is often mentioned that the purpose of the EU promotion of agricultural products, among others, is to *'highlight the specific features of agricultural production methods in the Union'*. In reality, there is absolutely no specific link to production methods!

PAN Europe has asked the European Commission on several occasions about how the promotion programme considers pesticides, and we invited the EC to focus on agronomic practices as a more sustainable way to achieve pesticide reductions. The European Commission often replied stating that the programme has been supporting organic agriculture, but also recognises that no other special focus has been given to promote products with low levels of pesticide residues. This need to change.

PAN Europe and its members welcome the F2F Strategy's aim to *"seek[ing] commitments from food companies and organisations to take concrete actions on health and sustainability."* Also, we welcome the fact that the F2F calls to *"revise marketing standards while 'strengthen[ing] the legislative framework on **geographical indications (GIs)** and, where appropriate, include[ing] specific sustainability criteria."* We call for GIs to include specific references to pesticide use reductions.

Example of a few companies having focused on phasing out pesticide use:

Organic wine producers (see examples from [our films](#)) illustrate how a few front runners moved towards organic even before the EU had its logo, while other companies are moving in the that direction now, like [Ferrari-Trento](#) who in their technical guidelines are telling farmers to stop using certain pesticides (like glyphosate, chlorpyrifos) long before they were proposed to be banned.

A proposal for the future could be that these technical guidelines fix overall reduction targets for individual farmers, for example achieving 50% reduction in 3 years.

The EU promotion policy should upgrade its eligibility criteria always including environmental and public health NGOs/consumer organisations/citizen forums as a key tool to increase transparency in the food chain

The purpose of the promotion programme is also to raise awareness among consumers of the efforts made by European farmers to provide quality products. However, the reality is that any industry these days wants to appear sustainable, while very few are willing to pay a fair price for a fair product. In many countries, the word Integrated Pest Management means following standard procedure while applying calendar pesticide spraying. And while this approach might appeal to industry, it is certainly not appealing either to farmers or to consumers.

Therefore, it is time to zoom in on production methods, which again can help fulfil the F2F Strategy's objectives in relation to: *"improv[ing] agricultural rules that strengthen the position of farmers (e.g. producers of products with geographical indications), their cooperatives and producer organisations in the food supply chain."*

Examples of local approaches which should be included into any promotion policy:

Farmers' cooperatives selling directly to consumers in Wallonia and Brussels include [Agri-covert](#), while direct sales examples include (from Brussels) [Aux Porte du Radis](#), but also [Community Supported Agriculture](#); examples from peri-urban farms include [La ferme du Chant des Cailles](#) and Groupe d'Achats Solidaires de l'Agriculture Paysanne ([GASAP](#)).

Again and again, the Eurobarometer survey on food safety shows that EU citizens trust consumer organisations and environmental NGOs: therefore, in order to boost the sustainability criteria, the promotion policy should be updated making sure that at least one consumer organisation or environmental NGO is actively involved in each project.

The F2F specifies that: “*The Commission will take action to scale-up and promote sustainable and socially responsible production methods and **circular business models** in food processing and retail.*”

Example concerning how retailers can scale up sustainable and socially responsible production methods:

Swedish producer association KRAV also involved NGOs to appeal to Swedish retailers on the need to give them shelf-space during COVID-19 (read [here](#)).

Example of how a few farmers are willingly engaging with other farmers and citizens in discussions about production methods and sustainability:

See for instance the videos of Paolo Mosca and *Cascine Orsine* on sustainable rice growing on PAN Europe's homepage: <https://www.low-impact-farming.info/rice-growing>

Note: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/1859-Evaluation-of-the-EU-agricultural-promotion-policy/public-consultation>

Pesticide Action Network Europe (PAN Europe) was founded in 1987 and brings together consumer, public health, environmental organisations, and women's groups from across Europe. PAN Europe is part of the global network PAN International working to minimise the negative effects and replace the use of harmful pesticides with ecologically sound alternatives. [For further information contact: Henriette Christensen, henriette@pan-europe.info](mailto:henriette@pan-europe.info)