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Letter | 23.03.2022

Letter on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive to the European Commission

Dear President of the European Commission Von der Leyen,
Dear Vice-Presidents,
Dear Commissioners,

We, the undersigned, are contacting you today to express our deep disappointment and outrage at the postponement of the proposal for a reform of the Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive, which should have been published this Wednesday, 23rd March 2022.

This decision is all the more deplorable, as we know that the draft of the reform has been finalised and is ready to go. Any delay now will only give those who oppose the transition to sustainable food systems a welcome opportunity to try to weaken this draft. Hence, we urgently ask you to keep to your commitments and ambitions under the Green Deal and publish this priority initiative as soon as possible.

In the Farm to Fork Strategy, the Commission acknowledged the urgent need to reduce our dependence on pesticides and committed to reduce the risk and overall use of chemical pesticides by 50% by 2030. Without the reform of the Sustainable Use Directive, the Commission would abandon this target, which is not acceptable given the huge cost to our health and that of our environment chemical pesticides represent.

However, since the beginning of the War in Ukraine, we have been witnessing very worrying and systematic attacks on the sustainability goals of the Green Deal - and particularly the Biodiversity and Farm to Fork Strategies - by lobbyists of the agricultural and agro-chemical industries. In the name of food security, they demand that climate and biodiversity protection take a backseat.

Such arguments are myopic, because climate change and biodiversity loss continue apace, despite the war. These two phenomena pose a terrible threat to our collective long-term food security and food sovereignty: The latest IPCC report reminds us that agricultural productivity is decreasing and that by 2100, one third of agricultural land could be unfit for cultivation due to environmental degradation - and pesticide use plays a significant role in this.

In addition, research has shown that the hidden costs of pesticide use for society actually far outweigh the economic benefits it is supposed to bestow. Thus, the societal cost for the damages caused by pesticides amounts to an estimated €2.3billion every year (including water decontamination, greenhouse gas

emissions, diseases caused by chemicals, VAT reductions and subsidies), while the sector itself makes a profit of some €900 million every year. In contrast, tripling organic farming by 2030 would cost the public purse only an estimated €1.85 billion per year, which clearly shows that spending such large amounts of money on pesticides is economic nonsense.

The intensification and hype-specialisation of agriculture have led us to become dependent on certain critical resources for our food production; not just pesticides, but also mineral / synthetic fertilisers and animal feed. The current crisis casts a harsh light on the irrationality of a highly intensive and specialised farming system, which relies heavily on such critical resources for our food production. Hence, the objective of reducing the use of synthetic pesticides is actually particularly relevant from a strategic point of view.

In addition, breaking this input dependence is also crucial form the viewpoint of farmers' economic sustainability. Farmers in the EU have been spending increasing amounts of money on pesticides and mineral / synthetic fertilisers, causing a rise in production costs, which means that their incomes are actually decreasing. This vicious cycle threatens their economic sustainability. A deep transformation of our agricultural system to sustainable, agro-ecological practices is the only way we can fix this and safeguard sustainable food production for future generations.

The concern about the ecological transformation of our agriculture and its capacity to ensure food security is based on the assertion that productivity will decrease. However, science shows that agro-ecology does not necessarily result in lower yields. Yet, the status quo has been proven to be unfit for purpose, as it would sacrifice our medium- and long-term food security for short-term gains such as the feeding of livestock and biofuels fermenters. Besides, we must not forget that the Farm to Fork strategy also aims to act on other important policy levers, which will have further positive knock-on effects in the food system, such as on diets, on the autonomy of livestock farming, on the reduction of food waste, on the increase in yields in other countries to name just a few.

In this spirit, we reiterate our urgent call for you not to delay any further and publish the reform proposal for the Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive as soon as possible.

Sincerely Yours,

Sarah Wiener

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François Alfonsi

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Responsible MEPs

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Member

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Member

Contact person

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Stakeholder Engagement Officer

Attached documents

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