International Confederation of European Beet Grower

CONFEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DES BETTERAVIERS EUROPEENS
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CONFEDERAZIONE INTERNAZIONALE DEI BIETICOLTORI EUROPEI

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CIBE feedback to the public consultation on the proposed Sustainable Use of Plant Protection Products (PPP) Regulation (SUR)

1. The feasibility of reaching the PPP use reduction targets in the proposed timeframe (i.e. 50% by 2030 compared to the 2015-2017 baseline) is extremely questionable and must be assessed carefully and thoroughly. **Comprehensive impact assessments should be provided to assess whether targets are feasible within the proposed baseline and timeframe,** taking into account the development of new practices already done and the depleting toolbox for crop protection. The presentation of the impact assessment (IA) by DG SANTE to the EP's Com AGRI on 31st August 2022 clearly showed that such a **thorough IA has not been conducted. Chapter 10 (Assessment of social, economic and environmental impacts of the Farm to Fork pesticide targets) of the Final Impact Assessment referred to by DG SANTE simply provides a qualitative overview** of different predictions on area and production for conventional farms as well as anticipated direct and indirect impacts on selected indicators of farm productivity and profitability, with **question marks denoting the uncertainty in the projection for most indicators** (Table 10-3). All this was drawn from an analysis of different political policy options and of a number of studies (where the terms "limitation" "uncertainty" and "unclear" abound) on the new regulatory landscape. While these **studies provide insights on how food production may evolve** if the Farm to Fork PPP reduction targets are met, **none of them are conclusive** and they are by no means an impact assessment.

2. In fact, the **Commission should first focus on making effective alternatives** to chemical PPPs (including disease-tolerant crop varieties obtained from NGTs) **available to farmers in the short and medium term**, so that the use of chemical PPPs can be reduced without jeopardizing crop yield or risking crop failure, thus compromising food security in the EU. This proposal on SUR should be redrafted and examined after an appropriate regulatory framework allowing the use of crops obtained by New Genomic Techniques (NGTs) as well as for an effective authorisation process for biological and effective plant protection products have been adopted.

3. **Definition of "sensitive areas" and the proposed ban on all pesticides use (be it chemical or non-chemical) in them should be reviewed:** first calculations and estimates indicate that the **percentage of UAA (utilised agricultural area) affected will be highly significant** (above 10%, in some cases over 25 and even over 50%) and will differ between MS (in some crop scenarios going well over 50%). In addition, one category of ecologically sensitive area, i.e. "any area for which the monitoring of pollinator species…establishes that it sustains one or more pollinator species which the European Red Lists classify as being threatened with extinction", is still not clearly defined, as the regulation establishing the monitoring of pollinator species – and identify ecologically sensitive areas accordingly – has not been adopted yet. In other words, it is at this stage impossible to estimate how much UAA will fall into a sensitive area, but there is a great risk that it will be larger than expected. In this context, the proposed ban on all pesticide use in sensitive areas (the extent of which is not even known at this stage) is unrealistic and cannot be accepted as such.

4. **Definition of crop-specific rules at national level should:**
   - be **less rigid**, the **double conditionality** of "after all other non-chemical methods have been exhausted" and "when a threshold for intervention is reached" will make satisfactory control of harmful organisms almost impossible in practice; **this double conditionality should be removed,**
   - for certain crops, allow for (and in certain situations even continue to recommend) **seed treatment with chemical PPPs as being part of IPM** (e.g. Germany's current Guidelines for Integrated Plant Protection in Sugar Beet growing),
   - **take into consideration, at crop level, the availability of <u>effective</u> (i.e. able to provide satisfactory control of harmful organisms) alternatives** to chemical pesticides and **adapt the timing of chemical pesticides reduction** accordingly.

5. In this context, the **Commission should apply its own current definition of IPM**, as stated in Article 6.3 of the current SUD, i.e.: "'integrated pest management' means careful consideration of all available plant protection methods and subsequent integration of appropriate measures that discourage the development of populations of harmful organisms and keep the use of plant protection products and other forms of intervention to levels that are economically and ecologically justified and reduce or minimise risks to human health and the environment."
   This definition does not systematically put the use of chemicals PPP aside until all other non-chemical methods have been exhausted and when a threshold for intervention has been reached. Such a restrictive, "last resort when all else has failed" approach risks leading to situations where when the use of chemical PPPs is finally allowed, it will be too late to provide satisfactory control of harmful organisms, be they pests, diseases or weeds.

6. **Technical deadlocks for sufficient and satisfactory crop protection must absolutely be avoided** in the light of the availability (or not) of **effective alternatives** for chemical PPPs. The EU beet growers' toolbox is being emptied at an alarming rate, with very few or no viable alternatives coming on stream. **Sugar beet growers' toolbox continues to shrink and makes a reduction of the use of pesticides impossible in the timeframe considered when the active substances left are less effective**: over 25 active substances have been lost (either through non-renewal of approval, through the applicant's decision not to apply for renewal of approval or through the introduction of restrictions on use) since 2018, including active substances intending to replace neonicotinoid seed treatment (e.g. sulfoxaflor) or thiram fungicide seed treatment (e.g. metalaxyl-M), compared to 3 (rather less effective) insecticide and 3 fungicide alternatives coming onstream. Further active substances (including 2 key herbicides) are threatened to disappear from the crop protection toolbox the short to medium term, while a further insecticide active substance will disappear in 2025 as the applicant has decided not to apply for renewal of approval. The ban on neonicotinoid seed treatment is leading to an increase in insecticide spraying. New tools (including new, more tolerant/resistant varieties) need to be made available to farmers as soon as possible to allow further improvement of good crop protection practices.

7. The indication by the **Commission to facilitate the placing on the market of PPPs containing biological active substances** to address the concerns of MS about the availability of alternatives to chemical PPPs appears to be an **empty promise**. When Commissioner Kyriakides discussed the SUR with Com ENVI on 30th June 2022, she stated that "Sustainability also means finding alternatives to chemical PPPs' without specifying whether such alternatives would be effective in providing satisfactory control of harmful organisms. The Commission should recognise that so far, **there is no material evidence that such alternatives of chemical PPPs will**:
   - in fact be **effective** (with regards to satisfactory control of harmful organisms) **alternatives to chemical PPPs**;
   - **become available to farmers** in sufficient numbers in the short and medium term.

The SUR should recall that alternatives to chemical PPPs should be **affordable**, **effective**, **safe** and sustainable. In this context, speeding up the authorisation of low-risk PPPs, biological PPPs and innovations such as RNA sprays is essential – but they **must be effective in providing satisfactory control of harmful organisms**, be they pests, diseases or weeds. In the specific case of sugar beet, it must be underlined that **effective weed control at the early stage of the crop is vital**: if weeds are not controlled satisfactorily, there will not be much crop left to protect against pests and/or diseases. Complete mechanical weed control (i.e. non-chemical) requires large investments and extensive manual work and is not economical because of insufficient labour capacities and of the estimated personnel costs.

8. **IPM should be recognised where it is already practiced** (i.e. crop rotation, choice of tolerant/resistant crop varieties, crop monitoring for weeds, pests and diseases). These principles of IPM are widely practiced by sugar beet growers in the EU and have contributed to minimising the use of PPPs in sugar beet growing for many years. It is therefore unlikely that continuing to implement these already widely applied IPM principles will make huge contributions towards reaching the unreasonable PPP use reduction targets, unless breakthrough innovation. IPM can be improved and supported further, especially via support for innovation, notably new genomic techniques (NGTs). **NGTs** and their potential to contribute to reaching reduction targets (e.g. via disease tolerant varieties) should be expressly mentioned among the effective alternatives to chemical PPPs. In that context, appropriate and fit for purpose legislation on plants obtained by NGTs should be introduced as soon as possible to give NGTs the opportunity to contribute to reaching the reduction targets. Furthermore, the promotion of and financial support for the development, further improvement (notably acreage capacity) and ultimately the deployment of other innovation techniques/tools such as precision application spraying (e.g. combined mechanical/chemical weeding, spot spray and/or smart spray) of PPPs, robotics and digital technologies would be more conducive to further reduce the use of PPPs than the mandatory reduction target approach. All promising technical solutions that are currently being developed should be promoted (including and especially financially) in such a way that they can be put into practice as quickly as possible, and thus become more widespread. Last but not least, there are crop health situations where a timely application of a chemical PPP is good IPM practice, because it can provide satisfactory control of a harmful organism at an early stage and can thus avoid having to resort to several PPP applications later in the crop season. Indeed, farmers sometimes need to resort to use PPPs even if it does not appear that a PPP application is necessary at that precise time, because they do not want (or simply cannot afford) to run the risk of having the impact of a pest or disease getting out of control by waiting with the PPP application until a later time when it is too late, damage to the crop is done and the resulting loss is all theirs to bear.

9. **Mirror measures should apply to imported products,** not only through MRLs or Imports tolerances to products imported to the EU, but also to crops grown in third countries which give rise to these products: e.g. an active substance not authorised in the EU should not be used in third countries to grow crops and/or their final products which are then imported to the EU.

10. **Increased administrative burdens and costs for farmers should be avoided**, or else financially compensated. The proposal by the Commission to support farmers with CAP funding is not acceptable. **Extra funding outside the CAP should be provided to help farmers in this transition**. This should include appropriate and adequately financed crop insurance schemes, which would allow farmers to manage the risk of crop losses and/or failures, and to be compensated for the losses occasioned by reduced PPP use.

11. **Harmonised Risk Indicators (HRI) should be adapted to different crops and take into consideration the actual availability of viable alternatives (i.e. providing satisfactory control of harmful organisms)**: the proposed weighting is highly disadvantageous for sugar beet, there being only 1 low-risk active substance (with a weighting of 1), 15 Candidates for Substitution (with a weighting of 16), around 5 non-approved active substances with an emergency authorisation (with a weighting of 64) and the remainder with a weighting of 8 in the current crop protection toolbox**.** The high weighting factor for non-approved active substances risks discouraging MS from granting emergency authorisations because the reaching of the reduction targets risks being given priority over addressing emergency situations in plant protection.

12. **The 2015-2017 baseline discriminates against and disadvantages some crops:** restrictions on neonicotinoid seed treatment were introduced **in 2018** (i.e. after the 2015-2017 baseline)**, leading to an increase in the use of insecticide PPPs** from 2019, notably in the countries/regions which did not obtain an emergency authorisation. Thus, compared to the Baseline 2015-17, the use of chemical PPPs in sugar beet has increased in some regions, going in the opposite direction. In addition, there is a real risk of pest populations building up further over the coming years, especially if there is a succession of mild winters: this in turn risks leading to further increases in PPP use.