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NOTE

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| From: | General Secretariat of the Council |
| To: | Delegations |
| Subject: | AOB item for the meeting of the "Agriculture and Fisheries" Council on 23 and 24 June 2025: A joint effort for a future-fit and competitive agriculture - Demands on the availability of effective plant protection methods <i>- Information from Austria, supported by Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal and Slovakia</i> |

The signatory Member States [Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal, Slovakia] are in favour of the sustainable and responsible use of plant protection products. The sustainable use of plant protection products as part of integrated pest management makes an important contribution to security of supply and ensuring European food production of the highest quality and safety.

The availability of effective plant protection methods is an essential basis for sustainable and competitive agriculture in the European Union. Research into alternatives to chemical plant protection products has taken on an increasingly important role.

The signatory Member States welcome the Commissions commitment in its vision for Agriculture and Food to take into account the availability of alternatives as part of the approval of active substances process. There needs to be practical and meaningful measures to give effect to this commitment.

The signatory Member States expressly welcome the intention of the European Commission to facilitate and accelerate the authorisation of biocontrols. While ensuring a high level of safety in the authorisation process, these initiatives create new opportunities in terms of integrated pest management and at the same time make an important contribution to achieving sustainability goals. A clear, practical and EU-wide harmonised implementation is therefore essential.

Chemical plant protection methods also continue to play an important part in integrated pest management and are often essential for ensuring high-quality production. Without effective means of combating harmful organisms, the yield and quality of food and animal feed cannot be adequately guaranteed. In times of geopolitical tensions, rising production costs and increasing weather extremes as well as the increased occurrence of harmful organisms due to climate change, and globalisation, security of supply is a key concern.

A dramatic and steady decline in the availability of active substances has been observed over the past few years. In the period 2014-2023 alone, 104 active substances were not renewed, while no new chemical active substances have been approved at EU level since 2019.

If no economically viable alternative methods are available, the non-approval of certain active substances, may result in significant yield losses depending on the crop. In the event of exceptionally high pest or disease pressure, the complete loss of a crop can occur.

The low availability of plant protection products is further exacerbated by the different authorisation situations in the Member States. Despite similar agronomic conditions, the authorisation situations differ greatly in some cases leading to distortion of competition within the internal market. These divergences may affect product availability in small Member States due to the diminishing level of interest among manufacturers of plant protection products. This fragmentation undermines the idea of a common European plant protection market and hinders the efficiency of cross-border production chains.

Effective and rapidly available plant protection products are also required to combat quarantine pests. The use of plant protection products in the form of Disinfectants for export material is also necessary in order to fulfil international phytosanitary requirements. Without these agents, there is a risk of trade barriers and economic damage.

In view of the **stability of EU food production** and the **current shortages of effective plant protection products**, the European Commission is called upon to urgently address the following measures in close cooperation with the Member States:

- 1. Consideration of food security in the evaluation procedure:** A balanced consideration of active substances must be ensured in the approval/renewal process, which takes into account environmental and health aspects as well as food security in the European Union and agronomic requirements. The assessment by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and subsequent risk management by the EU Commission should adequately take into account the practical requirements of sustainable agricultural production, the availability of feasible and effective plant protection products and methods for farmers and the resilience of food production to climatic and biological risks.
- 2. Examination of further simplification and harmonisation potential regarding authorisations of plant protection products within the same zone:** Authorisations of plant protection products are granted as part of a comprehensive evaluation procedure at Member State level. The national approach to mutual recognition in particular differs considerably in some cases. In the interests of a coherent authorisation regime in the European Union and to relieve the burden on competent authorities, further steps to ensure simplification and harmonisation in the authorisation process should be examined by the European Commission in order to facilitate the timely access to plant protection products by European farmers.
- 3. Improvement in the handling of the existing regime:** The existing active substance approval regime already contains provisions on approval criteria for active substances in the absence of alternatives. These have hardly been used to date, which is why practical solutions for utilising them should be found. In addition, the procedure of emergency authorisations must remain a practical tool for emergency situations including for regulated pest management.

4. **Drafting an EU-wide harmonised ‘future concept for plant protection’ to increase the competitiveness of EU agriculture:** This concept must target competitive disadvantages in the internal market, focus on availability of feasible plant protection methods, mutual recognition, improve communication between authorities, industry and users and ensure the integration of practice into the processes. Concrete solutions must ensure the protection of humans, animals and the environment on the one hand and safeguard agricultural production in all member states on the other.
 5. **Creating an innovation-friendly environment:** An innovation-friendly environment is crucial for developing effective and future-proof solutions for sustainable agriculture. Supporting alternative methods to chemical crop protection and integrating them into national and European research and innovation agendas helps to safeguard agricultural production in Europe. Biotechnological innovations and precision agriculture in particular open up potential for companies and thus new approaches, as do integrated pest management strategies that take into account soil and nutrient conditions as well as the use of biocontrol measures.
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