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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Council

Subject: The use of RENURE in anticipation of the evaluation of the Nitrates Directive
- Information from the Netherlands delegation, supported by the Danish and Italian delegations

Delegations will find in the Annex a note from the Netherlands delegation, supported by the Danish and Italian delegations on the above-mentioned subject, to be dealt with under "Any other business" at the Council (Agriculture and Fisheries) on 23 January 2024.

The use of RENURE in anticipation of the evaluation of the Nitrates Directive

The application of nutrients is essential for food production, be it from animal or synthetic sources. At the same time, we acknowledge that the application of nutrients should be done in a more sustainable way, with less impact on the environment, biodiversity, climate and the use of scarce natural resources. This is in line with the objectives of the European Green Deal, including the circular economy action plan, the biodiversity strategy and the farm to fork strategy.

More circular based agricultural practices – establishing smart connections between plant-based and animal products – should be at the core of a sustainable agrifood system. This implies a shift from the use of synthetic fertilisers to manure based fertilisers. Against this backdrop, we welcome the Commission initiative to draft an action plan for better management of the use of nutrients.

To enable the shift from the use of synthetic fertilisers to manure based fertilisers, a refit of the Nitrates Directive is desirable, abolishing the distinction being made between synthetic fertilisers on the one hand and manure-based fertilisers (like RENURE and digestate) on the other hand. We are pleased to note that the Commission is acting upon the call of many member states in earlier councils (17 October 2022 and 10 to 12 December 2023) as well as the European Parliament to make this shift possible by announcing an evaluation of the Nitrates Directive in order to enable new farming techniques such as RENURE¹ and digestate². Understandably this requires careful consideration. However, in the meantime there are many urgent challenges.

The goal of reducing CO₂ emissions by 55% in 2030 is rapidly approaching. Further recycling of animal manure would significantly decrease the necessity of producing industrial chemical fertilisers, an industry that currently consumes 1-2% of all energy produced in the EU, generating CO₂ emissions and increasing our dependency on natural gas.

¹ RENURE products are inorganic fertilisers from livestock manure, that comply with the six safe-manure criteria designed by the JRC in 2020. These criteria ensure the safe use of these products in Nitrate Vulnerable Zones, and could be used as a full substitute of inorganic fertilisers produced by the chemical industry.

² Digestate: material resulting from anaerobic digestion of agricultural matrices of livestock manure, animal by-products, olive mill vegetation water, and agricultural and forestry material not intended for food consumption, alone or in a mixture with each other.

Reducing the need of chemical fertilisers would also result in more strategic autonomy, reduced exposure of farmers to price shocks and overall fertilizer prices, and stability in food production. This against a background where the ongoing Russian aggression against Ukraine threatens food availability globally.

Furthermore, manure based fertilisers can be used in precision fertilisation. In this way, the ammonia emissions from stables as well as from field emissions can be reduced, diminishing detrimental emissions to nature. Contributions can therefore be made to the goals stated in the Birds and Habitats Directive and the new Nature Restoration Law.

Last but not least the re-use of minerals from manure would reduce mining activities of scarce natural minerals like phosphor (and in doing so reduce the negative impact of mining on climate).

Given these challenges and in anticipation of the outcome of the evaluation of the Nitrates directive we would appreciate having the opportunity in the short term to discuss with the Commission possible intermediate solutions to enable agricultural nutrient recycling (while at the same time reducing the use of synthetic fertilisers).
