



**Copa and Cogeca's
position on the Proposal
for a Regulation on the
Sustainable Use of
Plant Protection Products**

Brussels, 30th September 2022

Nowadays, the world is facing a number of challenges that threaten food security and society's wellbeing. Consumer demands are shifting and increasing, including requirements with respect to the product itself (quality, diversity) as well as how it is produced. Feeding the world thus entails an increasingly complex interplay between agronomic, environmental and economic values. The EU farming community is committed to EU values and common policies, such as the CAP, and is proud of the EU production model.

EU agriculture is already confronted with an increasing demand for food, feed and non-food outlet production. **In this regard, the EU Green Deal's objectives were set in the pre-pandemic era and, thus, did not factor in or provide for the cumulative crises that have since hit us**, namely Covid-19, the war in Ukraine and the continuous advance of climate change. Today, EU agriculture is faced with all three, albeit to different degrees. Due to these external factors heavily affecting the availability of certain inputs (e.g. fertilisers, energy), there has also already been a large increase in production costs in agriculture, which will probably not change in the near future.

Furthermore, it is clear that we will have to cultivate with even fewer natural resources and probably also deal with further effects derived from climate change such as new pests and diseases while, in addition, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and maintaining the same amount of productivity on the same amount of land. All of this to prevent additional soil degradation or deforestation.

On the other hand, safeguarding plant and crop health (e.g. food, ornamentals, seeds etc.) is, in principle, a cornerstone of all farming activities and modern arable farming in the European Union, irrespective of the production method, be it conventional, organic or otherwise. Copa and Cogeca generally support the goals of the EU Commission to reduce the use and risk of synthetic chemical plant protection products and to promote biodiversity in the agricultural landscape. However, in terms of implementation, the means proposed by the EU Commission to practically achieve these goals are questionable in many areas.

The Farm to Fork (F2F) strategy discussion was initially more focused on climate change and biodiversity challenges. However, given the forecast of serious market undersupply and extreme disruption of global supply chains, a review of the plans conceived back in 2019 is inevitable. All three pillars of sustainability (economic, social and environmental) in Europe must be considered before any legislative step forward is taken in this regard. As with energy, in agriculture, it is possible to strengthen our strategic autonomy while continuing to make progress on sustainability. We

support the EU objectives of making our Union healthier, improving its biodiversity and producing more sustainably, but we must also have the tools to continue producing in a sustainable way and ensuring output remains stable and sufficient.

We outline below our position on the main points reflected in the Commission's proposal for a "Regulation on the Sustainable Use of Plant Protection Products (SUR)":



Sticking to reduction targets despite new challenges will have a profound impact on EU society

In the current politically precarious situation, the EU should focus more than ever on the goal of ensuring food security. There are now enough studies showing that the Farm to Fork (F2F) strategy will have a negative impact on EU production and - according to current forecasts - lead to significant cuts in food production. In light of the current circumstances (war in Ukraine, EU's dependency on external agricultural inputs (i.e. energy and fertilisers) and soaring food prices in many countries), it is crucial that agricultural yields remain stable in order to produce sufficient quantities of high-quality and affordable products. This is the only way to ensure food security for citizens both in the EU and globally. Stable production of agricultural products or even an increase in production in the EU should, therefore, **be recognised as key in ensuring security of supply in the EU and internationally**. Thus, the Commission has committed to presenting global impact assessment studies, including elements linked to food security, in its proposal.

We believe that it is important for the Commission to first recognise and measure properly what has already been delivered by EU farmers in the past, in terms of the sustainable use of pesticides. In Europe, pesticide use and risk has decreased sharply over the past five decades¹. We would encourage the Commission to develop a method to take into account what has been already done in terms of on-farm innovation and application of IPM just as they have done for measuring and establishing the targets.



The current proposal jeopardises Europe's security of supply

This objective may be massively jeopardised by the Commission's plans. Moreover, it is to be expected that forced organic farming in large parts of Europe would cause existential hardship for countless farms without any appreciable benefit for the environment. The biological and mechanical methods of exterminating pests are not sufficient in certain regions and this information was very clearly



explained to the Commission by various states that face these problems. The productivity in these regions would be compromised. The conversion to organic farming is not an easy one. On top of new techniques and requirements, farmers also need adequate training to properly respect criteria set out in Regulation 2018/848. Furthermore, the fallout from the plans which would spill out beyond rural areas should also not be underestimated as food prices would continue to rise due to the artificially induced shortage.

The reduction targets for the use and risk of chemical pesticides by 2030 are therefore clearly overambitious and irresponsible considering the current socio-economic and political challenges. The various studies published last year (JRC, Wageningen, USDA, COCERAL, Euroseeds, University of Kiel, INRAE) all point in a worrying direction: agricultural production in the EU will decline sharply, prices and farmers' incomes will be severely affected and environmental benefits will be very limited in terms of food security and sustainability due to offshoring effects to third countries. Furthermore, the EU's dependence on food imports will increase dramatically and some studies even predict that the EU will become a net importer.

As Copa and Cogeca have been saying for years, and as the facts today clearly prove, food security is highly strategic and still very relevant. The EU Green Deal cannot be implemented at the cost of our production and, thus, the EU Institutions need to speed up all the work being done to provide EU agriculture with the tools to achieve those objectives while not reducing our production (e.g. NGTs, low risk substances, precision agriculture, digital tools, consistency with trade policy...). Farmers should have an appropriate toolbox at hand, therefore no substance shall be withdrawn from the market without having a safe, affordable and effective alternative solution available. Research and innovation will be key for the future in this regard.

No scientific basis for the Commission's proposals

This is also particularly problematic because the Commission cannot demonstrate that there are compelling reasons for such a forced action. The Impact Assessment Report accompanying the SUR does not sufficiently explore the impacts of the Commission's proposals on agricultural production. These impacts should, of course, be taken seriously and verified by appropriate research and field trials. It is irresponsible to compromise the sources of nutrition of more than 450 million people on the basis of an insufficient impact assessment. Similarly, it is incomprehensible that the assessments of the technical authorities are hardly heard at both

European or national level. The review and setting of new future targets must, therefore, be based exclusively on sound scientific knowledge. The Commission's proposal to compare the reduction with the average of the years 2015, 2016 and 2017 does not provide a sufficient basis for setting a threshold in a Member State or achieving a 50% reduction in PPP use, let alone the even higher reduction ambition set for certain Member States going above a 60% reduction target. The data currently available on actual PPP use in the EU is simply insufficient for this. Setting the minimum reduction target proposed by the Commission without a sufficient agronomic or scientific basis is particularly detrimental to countries that have already significantly reduced the use of chemical and hazardous plant protection products. A further reduction would mean even higher yield losses, lower competitiveness and a greater threat to the security of food supply in the EU. The proposed path, therefore, does not lead to a level playing field between Member States or in international trade scenarios. Finally, there would be contradictions in the regulatory framework in all Member States such as in certain dangerous situations whereby legislation would require the use of proper plant protection tools - including conventional products - in epidemics created by alien and invasive species, for instance, to efficiently eradicate those pathogens.

Same rules also needed for imported goods

EU farmers are already in direct competition with the rest of the world. It is, therefore, essential to adopt coherent internal and external policies in order to tackle the issue of competitiveness between the various farming sectors across the world.

EU policies will increasingly push up production costs. Furthermore, raising the standards for producers in the EU while simultaneously increasing imports of products from third countries due to decreasing yields is, in our opinion, the wrong approach. This is especially true if these countries have lower requirements for the use of plant protection products than European farmers as it promotes leakage. It does not only put European farmers at an enormous economic disadvantage, but also causes more plant protection products to be used elsewhere on the planet. Therefore, the limitations and obligations with which European producers have to comply should, in principle, also apply to imports into the EU and these imports should be monitored regularly. This should become a non-negotiable factor in free trade negotiations. If EU farmers have to face tighter restrictions on cultivation and implement higher production standards in line with the EU framework (e.g., SUR), we expect those high requirements to be mirrored for imports entering the EU.





Without effective alternatives, a 50% reduction of use is irresponsible

In the draft SUR, the EU Commission gives the impression that there are already sufficient alternatives on the market to substitute currently used chemical-synthetic plant protection products. However, this is by no means the case. The few products already on the market are far less efficient at achieving what conventional PPPs can and this is expected to remain the case over the short and medium term. The lack of suitable alternatives to chemical plant protection products is increasingly forcing farmers to rely on emergency authorisations provided for in EU legislation for unforeseen circumstances and depending on plant protection needs. Only once sufficient and effective alternatives, such as low-risk PPPs or biologically based PPPs, are approved and available on the European internal market will a reduction in the use of chemically-synthesised plant protection products in the order of magnitude envisaged by the Commission be possible. Fewer and fewer active substances available will lead to higher pest resistance and product application rates by farmers. Above all, extreme weather events are already a constant and the reduction of the low amounts of pesticides currently used by certain states in these extreme conditions will have negative consequences that the Commission has not evaluated. Considering the different percentages outlined by the Commission for each Member State, it is unbearable to see how EU countries are treated differently, particularly when the justification given by the Commission is mainly based on PPP intensity usage level and volumes chiefly based on sales data without factoring in the climate conditions of the country under consideration, the various crop production methods used across different countries and regions and annual outbreaks of new invasive alien species (dangerous for plants, animals and humans). In this regard, we should also highlight the risk of yield and production losses that specialty crop production will suffer across the three main regions of the EU - Northern, Central and Southern Europe - with this Regulation, as there is still a huge lack of proper, targeted tools for this niche market, making it even more difficult to maintain this high value production for the future.



Promoting innovation instead of imposing bans

From our perspective, no ban on active substances should come into effect without having solutions at hand. PPPs will remain an essential element in IPM for the future even if their share decreases. Nevertheless, we need to consider how it still takes a long time for low-risk substances and biopesticides to become available on the market. At the same time, authorisations for the renewal of conventional

PPP are increasingly refused in decisions at EU level. As a result, this leaves the farmers' toolbox unable to fight pests and diseases adequately that affect their crops, leading to consequent compromises to food supply and security for consumers.

To tackle this, we insist that sustainable, scientifically sound, effective, safe and affordable plant protection products of any nature will continue to be necessary in the future so that EU farmers can remain competitive and produce sufficient quantities of high-quality, healthy food. To achieve this goal, innovation must be encouraged and new products brought to market quickly. Moreover, it is important to develop adapted genetic, robotic, digital and agronomic solutions to reconcile agricultural production with environmental protection. Focusing on stricter rules for farmers, however, will not solve the fundamental issue of setting up an adequate, safe and effective plant protection scheme in the farms. Appropriate transitional periods and sufficient time and money for basic research are needed to allow the supply sector to bring new alternative products to the market. The fact that it takes on average ten years for the current low-risk products to reach the market shows that the proposed timescale is not sufficient. It is therefore of utmost importance to simplify, speed up and differentiate the procedures for registering low-risk PPPs. This is by no means practicable by lowering technical testing standards. What is required is a clear streamlining of the overflowing bureaucracy of registration procedures.



No further restrictions in protected areas

Copa and Cogeca are worried about the extent of the areas concerned and reject further blanket management restrictions in protected areas. While we acknowledge the European Commission's intention to introduce special protection for select, or so-called "sensitive", areas in which the use of certain pesticides will be limited, we are concerned that these rules diverge from a rational approach and may be interpreted in an infinite amount of ways. The definition of 'sensitive area' is extremely broad and unclear at the moment. Having no precise information on which specific areas are concerned or how these provisions are to be read may lead to overly ambitious misinterpretations and potentially form a gateway to permanent bans being introduced on the use of all pesticides on areas of land used for agricultural purposes. This would undoubtedly have a significant, negative impact on agricultural production in some Member States.

Instead, a differentiated, site-specific cooperative approach is required, depending on the respective conservation objective of the protected area. This applies not least to legislations that are far removed



from reality, such as a 14-day deadline for officially approving measures in protected areas or the obligation to announce approved operations by means of signs at the borders of the respective protected area. It would be contrary to good professional practice if farmers were informed only several days in advance about the implementation of plant protection measures which, depending on the weather and disease and pest infestation, are not decided and implemented prophylactically but rather at very short notice. Further compounding the fact that competent authorities lack the necessary staffing to issue such permissions is the unacceptable proposed timeframe.

Last but not least, we feel that excluding the use of any plant protection product, especially if that includes non-chemical measures (e.g. biocontrol measures), would be too extreme and very detrimental for many regions that depend on agricultural production primarily dedicated to high-value speciality crops that cannot be cultivated elsewhere.



No need to increase the bureaucratic burden on farmers and authorities

Documentation already takes up a considerable amount of time in farmers' daily work. Therefore, if data collection pertaining to the application of plant protection methods is demanded, any additional bureaucratic and administrative burden for farmers should be avoided. Compulsory digital documentation of all measures represents a considerable additional effort, especially for smaller farms, without any corresponding benefit being apparent. The possibility provided for in the Regulation proposal to check whether certain measures are necessary at farm level still needs more nuance as this would require a large number of additional environmental parameters to be documented first and made available to producers in a timely manner. It is, furthermore, not possible to make any scientific evaluations about the effects on biodiversity on the basis of the documentation since the necessary additional information is also lacking. It would therefore be much more effective to set up a representative network of farms and thus collect qualified data for the evaluation of the measures. Copa and Cogeca also categorically reject the demand for an electronic register for (almost) all equipment for the application of plant protection products, as the possible expense far exceeds the expected benefit of this measure and will only increase the workload and the economic and administrative burden on farmers. Any further requirement regarding data should be coherent with other legal instruments, mainly with the "Regulation on Statistics on agricultural input and output (SAIO)".

In addition, we recognise the value of independent

advisory services for farmers to further implement sustainable field practices as long as this does not impose further burdens. The impartiality of an advisory service for farmers will always ensure that farmers obtain the greatest benefit, as much at production level as with a potential collective commercialisation (e.g. farms in cooperatives). However, we would also highlight that cooperatives' own advisory services should be considered as impartial and independent. Without opposing the principles of training and controls as such, we stress the fact that these agri-cooperatives' advisory services do not only work for their members, but also for other farmers even in distant rural areas, and these services are key and affordable for them to go further on making agriculture sustainable. Finding enough independent advisory offices for all farmers will not be feasible at national level in every Member State. Training should keep pace so as to be proportionate with and guarantee availability.

Furthermore, as soon as we are bound to share all data, farmers will lose ownership to a great extent as third parties will be able to demand access to it for no reason other than governments needing to be transparent. We would also require clarification on how the data required will be further used so as not to compromise farmers' private and confidential information. The proposal that "Each professional user shall retain the services of an independent advisor" may, moreover, be unrealistic depending on the costs of this advisory service, particularly as some rural areas in the EU have no or very low profitability and may not be able to afford this kind of service themselves while remaining productive and competitive.



Amending the Regulation on the National Strategic Plans is not the solution to ensure the transition

We may welcome the inclusion of support measures for farmers during the first five years after the entry into force of the Regulation to facilitate the application and implementation of certain provisions at farm level, however we cannot welcome this option for support through the CAP. First of all, the support measures included in the current CAP have already been cut down and, furthermore, the development of the National Strategic Plans (NSP) is currently in its final stage in all Member States, with the budget set and allocated to the different pillars, measures and interventions.

Secondly, we understand from the Commission that these funds, even being voluntary by definition, would be used exceptionally to help farms comply with mandatory rules set in the Regulation before becoming voluntary again after 5 years. Even in that case, we would once again be using CAP funds to support actions/measures that go

beyond legislative requirements that are not part of existing EU legislation. Going beyond legislative requirements means going beyond enhanced conditionality and, as such, any such support would fall into the category of eco-schemes (in pillar 1) or agro-environmental-climate and welfare commitments. Both are mandatory for Member States but voluntary for farmers. If applied, this would mean that we would be looking at these two measures becoming de facto mandatory for farmers (with or without CAP support).

Thirdly, the period covered by the future CAP is 2023-2027. However, the 5-year transitional period mentioned may go beyond that depending on the entry into force of the Regulation. This is not likely to happen before 2024, so this means that the measures would not fit into the timeline of the next CAP period, but the one after 2027. In any case, we do not yet have any comprehensive impact assessment available that may allow us to understand the measures required to be implemented or achieve the targets with the help of these proposed funds. This does not provide any future certainty for farmers in any case.

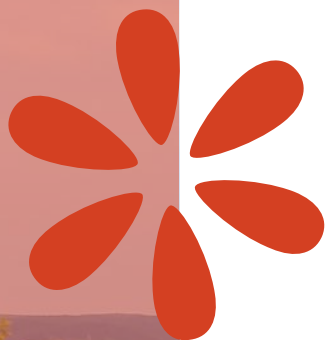
Finally, it is of the utmost importance that the calculation and process of setting up national targets for the Member States shall be transparent. In addition, the indicators intended to monitor the implementation of this Regulation shall be uniform and very well-defined at EU level.



Copa and Cogeca's demands

We would ask for a fundamental readjustment of the EU Commission's proposals. Moreover, accelerating the approval processes for new active substances is crucial, whether chemical-synthetic or from biological origin. Thirdly, we insist on the need for a full impact assessment with a view to security of supply with nutrients and leakage effects. Last but not least, from our perspective, the key focus for the future of sustainable plant protection should be adaptation to farms' realities, targeted research and a request to accelerate biocontrol and the development of New Genomic Techniques (NGTs), proper training and advice for farmers and precision farming.





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Copa and Cogeca are the united voice of farmers and agri-cooperatives in the EU.

Together, they ensure that EU agriculture is sustainable, innovative and competitive, guaranteeing food security to half a billion people throughout Europe. Copa represents over 22 million farmers and their families whilst Cogeca represents the interests of 22,000 agricultural cooperatives. They have 66 member organisations from the EU member states.