Further improving farming sustainability via Integrated Pest Management: challenges & opportunities ahead

4 May 2021, 14:00 – 16:00 CEST

Co-Chaired by: MEP Norbert Lins (EPP), MEP Ulrike Müller (Renew Europe), MEP Sarah Wiener (Greens/EFA)

Vice-Chairs of the European Parliament Intergroup on 'Climate Change, Biodiversity & Sustainable Development'

Speakers:

- **MEP Norbert Lins**
- **MEP Ulrike Müller**
- **MEP Sarah Wiener**
- **Andrew Owen-Griffiths,** Head of Unit for Plants and organics, DG SANTE, European Commission
- **Pierre Bascou,** Director for direct support, DG AGRI, European Commission
- **Pedro Gallardo**, Vice-President, COPA-COGECA
- **Bérénice Dupeux**, Senior Policy Officer for Agriculture, EEB
- **Laurent Oger**, Regulatory Affairs Director, CropLife Europe
- **Bill Wirtz**, Senior Policy Analyst, Consumer Choice Center
- **Jennifer Lewis**, Executive Director, IBMA

Moderator:

- **Mark Titterington,** Co-Founder, FFA

Welcome remarks by hosting MEPs

MEP Norbert Lins

> ***"An efficient IPM pursues a two-fold objective. First, it discourages the use of pesticides and second, it provides farmers with a toolbox of alternatives to ensure sustainable agricultural practices"***

Opening the event, **MEP Mr. Lins** acknowledged that **EU agricultural practices are the most sustainable worldwide**. With a view to foster environmental and climate protection, agriculture can play a fundamental role. To this end, discussions pertaining on whether and how to use plant-protection products (PPPs) have taken center stage. Under the assumption that **PPPs should be employed as much as necessary and as little as possible**, **Integrated Pest Management** (IPM) can both **discourage the use of pesticides** and **equip farmers with a toolbox of alternatives to ensure sustainable agricultural practices**. Against the background of many MEPs attempting to ban products by referring to their maximum residue levels (MRLs), Mr. Lins recalled that unscientific assumptions take away the possibility for integrated pest management. Conversely, **EU decision-makers should stick to science-based decisions** on the advice of the European Food Security Authority (EFSA), while opening further avenues for innovation, products efficiency, and digitization.

MEP Ulrike Müller

> ***"Reducing input use and its negative effects on the environment while facing the challenges of climate change is a huge challenge for farmers. We need to create a framework that allows innovation to thrive to equip farmers with the necessary means"***

As a preliminary remark, **MEP Ms. Müller** stressed that **no farming sector can exist without crop protection** to protect yields, farmers income and not least consumer health. In this understanding, on one side the EU needs to minimize the harmful environmental side-effects of crop protection, while on the other it must enable farmers to face the consequences of climate change. From Ms. Müller's perspective, the introduction of **eco-schemes** in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the **Farm to Fork Strategy** (F2F) are **joint responses to these needs** and show the way forward for a more sustainable food system. Sharing a view already expressed by the PEST and ENVI Committees, Ms. Müller reiterated that the **transition towards sustainable food farming will require a more agile**

EU-wide pesticides approval system, aimed at providing farmers with alternatives to current PPPs and coupled with an innovative and technology-based IPM.

MEP Sarah Wiener

> ***"Speaking of agriculture, the EU should not sacrifice innovative solutions on the altar of short-termism and rather than solely reducing PPPs, the EU should prioritize organic farming, which does away with PPPs by definition"***

MEP Ms. Wiener started by noting that although much has been done, EU's path towards ensuring a healthy and sustainable farming sector remains filled with obstacles, adding that there is still extensive room for improvement. Shedding light on the main hurdles, Ms. Wiener drew attention on resource scarcity, irrigation and water shortages and biodiversity loss, urging the need for the EU to provide far-reaching solutions. When it comes to agriculture, **the EU should not sacrifice innovative solutions on the altar of short-termism**, Ms. Wiener advocated, pointing out that **rather than solely reducing PPPs**, **the EU should prioritize organic farming**, which does away with PPPs by definition. From the speaker's standpoint, challenges ahead and especially climate-related ones impose the decentralization of the EU agricultural system as a necessity, as well as illustrating the need for alternative agricultural systems, notably agroforestry, permaculture and micro-farming. Shifting focus to IPM, Ms. Wiener recognized that it is only viable as a transitional approach, arguing that evidence from South Tyrol reveals that pesticide-based agriculture and IPM produce similar outcomes. Another layer of complexity is that pesticides contribute to practices whereby small-scale farmers remuneration comes from government subsidies rather than product sales, Ms. Wiener underlined; a vicious circle that can be broken with science-based solution and by leaving the door open for alternative sustainable farming approaches.

Keynote addresses

Andrew Owen-Griffiths, Head of Unit for Plants and organics, DG SANTE, European Commission

> ***"If we are going to ask sound implementation of IPM, Member States will need flexibility and an increased toolbox of alternatives to pesticides. Our action cannot be limited to pesticide removal: we need alternatives that follow the IPM hierarchy"***

Representing European Commission's DG SANTE, as a starting point **Mr. Owen-Griffith** commented that IPM is a deep-rooted decision-making process with extensive applications worldwide. As for the EU, **IPM has been embedded in the Sustainable Use Directive** (SUD) since 2009 and has come under a regular inter-institutional scrutiny. Concerning the SUD implementation patterns, Member States usually incorporate IMP, albeit differences persist depending on the regions and the crops. In addition, Mr. Owen-Griffith admitted that often **Member States are unable to provide adequate information on the state of implementation of IPM** and that occurrence frustrates any monitoring attempt by the European Commission. Alongside Member States' difficulties, by postulating a wide range of alternatives for pest prevention and several mitigation measures, including crop rotation and physical methods, **SUD Annex III provides unclear priorities for farmers**. On another level, a sound **implementation of IPM** is fundamental, Mr. Owen-Griffith highlighted, given its implications on the **Farm to Fork Strategy's objectives**, notably to reduce the use of chemical pesticides by 50% by 2030. In that light, the SUD Directive will be subject to a review whose completion is expected for Q1 of 2022, while IPM principles will remain unaltered. According to Mr. Owen-Griffith, for the time being, stakeholders were consulted, and the European Commission is fairly advanced in establishing policy options to be submitted for impact assessments. Meanwhile, the **European Commission** is considering developing **crop-specific guidelines at member state level**, so that IPM principles can be tailored on specific realities. Crucially, Member States and their farmers will be enabled to draw from an expanded toolbox, which will provide alternative non-chemical tools that follow the IPM hierarchy, such as crop rotation resistant varieties, and will enhance the role of biological control. In perspective, Mr. Owen-Griffith remarked, once completed the CAP reform process will promote IPM beyond minimum legal requirements.

Pierre Bascou, Director for direct support, DG AGRI, European Commission

"Alongside the F2F Strategy, the CAP has a pivotal role to play: 90% of EU farmers receive direct payments and through conditionality the EU can have direct bearings, influencing the use of PPPs and improving IPM"

Speaking on behalf of the European Commission's DG AGRI, **Mr. Bascou** focused on the synergic aspects of the CAP reform and IPM implementation. Acknowledging their unquestionably leading role in addressing food security in the past, the speaker admitted that nowadays **pesticides constitute a major threat to biodiversity conservation** and, in the IPM rationale, **should be solely used as a last resort**. In accordance with the F2F's targets, the EU is committed to achieve a far-reaching transition to sustainable farming and its success will largely hinge on the capacity to achieve, through IPM, **a 50% pesticides reduction by 2030**. Alongside the F2F Strategy, the **CAP has a major role to play**: 90% of EU farmers receive direct payments and **through CAP conditionality the EU can have direct bearings, influencing the use of PPPs**. In the context an imminent reform, Mr. Bascou stressed that, when assessing CAP National Strategic Plans, the Commission will keep track of Member States' use of PPPs, assessing their compliance with F2F aspirational targets for pesticides. Among others, the **CAP reform will widen the scope of Member States instruments for promoting sustainable use of pesticides**, by **introducing both mandatory** – the 8 general principles set in the SUD - and **voluntary practices**, such as re-elaborated crop rotation, land lying fallow for biodiversity purposes and use of resistant crop varieties. Crucially, a **conditionality approach will tie proper use of pesticides to CAP national payments**, penalizing Member States which do not abide by pesticides regulation with reduced budget. In like manner, the SUD will follow a conditionality approach, by bounding Member States to account for their implementation progress. Moreover, the CAP Reform is intended to include incentive mechanisms in the first pillar, such as eco-schemes, rewarding farming practices going beyond minimal standards, and management commitment in the second.

With a view to provide guidance to Member States, Mr. Bascou added, the European Commission will shortly publish a **study** aimed at **sharing EU-wide virtuous IPM practices**, in order to **facilitate the elaboration of CAP National Strategic Plans by Member States**. **Further assistance** to Member States will come financially, **through Horizon Europe funding**, and at the level of knowledge transfer, by **exploiting the potential of the transnational Agriculture Knowledge and Innovation System** (AKIS) among EU farmers.

Concluding his address, Mr. Bascou underlined that the future CAP will hold a prominent spot in the

EU's transition towards full sustainability, resilience and competitiveness in the agricultural sector and will, by fostering IPM, nonetheless contribute to achieve the expected reduction in the use of pesticides. Prior to giving the floor to the next speakers, Mr. Bascou was asked whether the EU agricultural sector is doing enough with regards to research and innovation. On this note, the speaker contended that **overhauling the EU agricultural system as it stands requires further technological innovation** and crucially, **reaching farmers with new technological outputs.**

Intervention

Pedro Gallardo, Vice-President, COPA

> ***"Science-based and holistic impact assessments should be performed before establishing targets to reduce the use of conventional PPPs while not having accessible alternatives at hand"***

Within his remarks **Mr. Pedro Gallardo**, Vice-President of COPA, underlined the **key role of agricultural producers in ensuring food availability, job creation and environmental protection**, as pesticide and fertilizer reduction objectives under the Farm to Fork Strategy (F2F) present both opportunities and challenges for agricultural farms.

In Mr. Gallardo's view, **challenges** relate to the need to **ensure food security under increasing demands to address environmental impacts**, while **satisfying consumer demands**. To successfully attain these goals, farmers must have at their disposal a safe, effective and affordable toolbox that includes crop protection products. Moreover, access to European markets of crops using techniques prohibited in the EU prevents European producers from competing in a level playing field. As IPM allows farmers to move towards low-risk and selective techniques, the availability and accessibility of IPM tools is key to enable a shift towards more sustainable agriculture. Beyond agronomic and physical control practices, PPPs will remain important in ensuring high quality products, Mr. Gallardo said.

In the light of this, **PPP reduction objectives should take account of the limited availability of credible and realistic alternatives**, and **better clarify and communicate about the expectations placed on farmers**. To remedy the current shortcomings, the essential role of innovation in enhancing sustainability while remaining competitive must be acknowledged. **The development of alternatives to conventional PPPs requires bridging the gap between researchers and producers**, **involving all value chain participants** to improve the translation of findings into readily available and affordable

tools. To address the decreasing range of authorized and accessible products, clear, transparent, and quick procedures for the evaluation of new substances must be adopted.

Panel Discussion moderated by Mr. Titterington

Bérénice Dupeux – Senior Policy Officer for Agriculture, EEB

> ***"Integrated Pest Management is not new, and is mandated by the Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive since 2014. However, there is a clear lack of political will in enforcing the Directive"***

In addition to their negative effects on biodiversity, the impact of pesticides on soil and water pollution is also a crucial challenge, **Ms. Dupeux** stated. Beyond the impact of individual pesticide releases, the **potential cocktail effects between pesticide residues in both land and water pose increased and unpredictable effects**. Halving pesticides use is absolutely feasible with current knowledge and technologies, reducing the first 50% of pesticides use is the low hanging fruit. Additionally, **it is critical that Member States promote holistic solutions that draw on synergies across environmental dimensions**, **focusing on agroecological systemic changes** that will have long term effects and improve the resilience of farmers to pressures arising from climate change. While praising the intention of the European Commission to work in this direction in the ongoing Sustainable Pesticide Directive (SUD), Ms. Dupeux mentioned that the **current system in place does not include specific benchmarks for assessing IPM implementation** nor specify the targets to be reached. To fill the current implementation gap, it is **essential that CAP National Strategic Plans and the National Action Plan under the SUD directive** include **quantitative targets and definite timetables** that allow the Commission to monitor progress towards the European Green Deal's vision, Ms. Dupeux argued. Likewise, the **creation of data on the risk related to emergency use authorizations** and **improved monitoring on the quantity and the potency of used pesticides** are **essential to assess the effect of the current framework on PPPs** use, impacts and availability. In this respect, existing data points to the existence of a dynamic and accessible market of alternative solutions, with increasing numbers of approved active substances, rising emergency authorizations and a growing biocontrol sector.

Laurent Oger – Regulatory Affairs Director, CropLife Europe

> ***"The ongoing revision of the Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive is a perfect opportunity to foster the uptake of new and innovative solutions and tools. Such a focus on Integrated Pest Management is right, but better implementation and tracking are needed."***

Speaking on behalf of CropLife Europe, **Mr. Oger** argued that the ongoing **SUD revision is key to foster the uptake of innovative practices in the agricultural sector**. In Mr. Oger's view, while existing IPM strategies have had important impacts, better publication and dissemination of such efforts are needed. Some of the regulatory elements introduced in the legislation have supported the phasing out of several conventional PPPs in favor of better profiled alternatives over the last 10 years. However, despite rising numbers of active substances registered**, solutions for specific crop-pest combinations have become less available.**

In addition to the above, Mr. Oger **praised the successes of the training systems put in place by the SUD**, and pointed to the possibilities of **regular and continued training** as a way to **disseminate knowledge on IPM and farming innovation**. In this context, to ensure the relevance of research efforts for farmers, **the connection between producers and researchers should be strengthened**. Similarly, IPM schemes must be responsive to the specificities of geographic locations, crops, and growing conditions. Whereas many protocols exist at national levels, there is a **lack of collection, public awareness and delivery tracking; EU actions to remedy these shortcomings could focus on the feedback and coverage of enforcement efforts**.

Answering a question on the efforts undertaken by the crop protection industry to reduce the use and risk of pesticides and aid growers in moving towards sustainability, Mr. Oger presented investment commitments on precision and digital as well as biopesticides research of 10 and 4 billion euros respectively by 2030. **In both cases, complementing different approaches and measures remains key to effective and sustainable crop protection.**

Bill Wirtz – Senior Policy Analyst, Consumer Choice Center

> ***"The purpose of IPM needs to be related to safeguarding food safety, food security and affordability. Our food is today healthier, safer, and more affordable than ever before, and part of the reason why we have more accessible and safe food is crop protection."***

In **Mr. Wirtz**'s view, the objectives pursued by IPM must be food safety, food security and affordability. Current practices – including crop protection – are delivering on all these counts, and **food safety, availability and affordability are higher than ever**.

IPM practices have led to far-reaching reductions of pesticide use, which have positive environmental impacts and are in the financial interest of farmers. Research and innovation in green technologies bears the potential to further advance in the same direction.

While pesticide reductions have positive impacts, measures taken in this respect should be grounded on science, and be attentive to potential unintended effects, Mr. Wirtz quoted. Most notably, the **emergence of unregulated markets for unlisted pesticides would pose great health hazards for both consumers and farmers**. Furthermore, price increases arising from reduced availability or rising production costs must be taken into account for their effects on food accessibility.

Replying to a question on **whether the EU should promote IPM practices through trade diplomacy**, Mr. Wirtz **defended that consumers should be able to choose food produced** with different standards, and that **demand should drive voluntary adherence to IPM practices** by other countries' producers. Moreover, asked about the **willingness of consumers to pay for IPM products**, Mr. Wirtz argued that it is **subject to the understanding of the positive benefits of IPM**. To raise awareness and facilitate consumer choice, voluntary positive labelling could be promoted.

Jennifer Lewis – Executive Director, IBMA

> ***"Bioprotection works with and enhances existing ecosystems so building biodiversity back into agriculture. An EU definition of bioprotection would enable its use as an indicator of IPM implementation."***

On behalf of IBMA – the International Biocontrol Manufacturers Association – **Ms. Jennifer Lewis** welcomed an SUD revision that develops an IPM definition putting agronomic practices before biological control and sees chemical products only as a last resort. In this respect, the use of **bioprotection could be a good indicator of IPM uptake.** Ms. Lewis cited a case study in rice in Albufera in Spain showing how bioprotection directly enhances biodiversity and proposed that to foster adoption of bioprotection approaches, the new CAP could fund the use of bioprotection instruments through eco-schemes. However, an EU definition of bioprotection is needed to enable the separation of bioprotection from chemical crop protection products and facilitate the use and

measurement of bioprotection uptake.

Ms. Lewis then turned to examining the current barriers to bioprotection products in the European regulatory framework. Currently, most biological protection categories fall under the pesticide regulation (Regulation 1107/2009), which is designed for chemical products. Problems arising from this – including **slow market authorization timeframes** and **inappropriate data requirements** – **might prevent wide market access by 2030** while not bringing proportional gains in risk mitigation.

The Commission is currently adapting part of the requirements for microbial bioprotection products a change which is eagerly awaited. To further speed up the authorization process, Ms Lewis proposed the provision of more expert biologists in competent authorities to review bioprotection authorisations. When looking at further adaptations of the regulation Ms Lewis suggested learning from similar experiences in related areas such as the shift from fertilizers to biostimulants.