

## **SPEAKING NOTE – PEST COMMITTEE**

### **EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**

**28<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2018**

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you very much for inviting Copa-Cogeca, the united voice of EU farmers and agri-cooperatives to this important debate.

For those who don't know us, Copa and Cogeca are the united voice of farmers and their cooperatives in the European Union. Together, they represent 23 million farmers and their families and 22,000 European agricultural cooperatives.

The protection of crops is a keystone of all farming activity and modern arable farming in the European Union, irrespective of the production method. Plant Protection Products (PPPs) are used in agriculture to protect plants from pests and diseases, as part of farmers' economic activity. Thus, they do have an impact on biological activity and subsequently there is a risk involved in their use.

From our point of view, pesticide active substances should be treated like most other substances of concern for human health and the environment, considering issues of risk and exposure. We regret that the EC keeps the hazard-based approach for PPPs instead of a risk-based one which takes into account hazard (including potency) and exposure.

As part of their job, farmers use PPPs to grow healthy crops and ensure an economic outcome of their work, provide safe food and safeguard the environment. At the same time, they have to take into account consumers' requests.

In this respect, the market is looking for zero tolerance when it applies to quality (i.e. free from damages caused by pests) and often the information about PPPs presented to the general public ignores the role they play in delivering safe, reliable and affordable products.

In order to keep as many solutions in the toolbox as possible, Copa and Cogeca support safe active substances (be they chemical or biological) to be put in the market. When a safe use for one active substance cannot be demonstrated, Copa and Cogeca do not ask for the (re)-authorisation of the active substance.

Regulation 1107/2009 draws on the principles of the European General Food Law to establish the procedure underpinning the placing of PPPs on the market. EFSA plays a key role in this procedure by ensuring a consistent evaluation of active substances. Therefore, Copa and Cogeca base their decisions on EFSA's assessment while asking for appropriate risk management and mitigation measures when needed.

In the authorisation or re-authorisation process, EFSA provides independent, transparent and professional scientific assessments. Thus, Copa and Cogeca are and always have been strong supporters of EFSA's mission and objectives ever since its inception. The EU Institutions and Member States also have a key role to play to support our strong scientific authority.

We can always improve the way scientific methods are applied but the role of EFSA remains crucial for the correct functioning of the Single Market and the European Union.

It is also essential to keep in mind that farmers remain the primary users of PPPs. Therefore, it is in their own interest to store, handle and apply the products in a safe way to protect human health in general and themselves in particular. Directive 2009/128, on the sustainable use of pesticides (SUD) already provide measures to reduce the risk of PPPs for human health and the environment, while also seeking to streamline appropriate use in the cultivation of crops.

As part of the requirements established in this Directive, farmers receive official training to become professional users. This training includes both initial and additional training about the potential risks to human health and the environment and of the appropriate measures to reduce those risks when applying, storing or handling PPPs.

Moreover, this Directive also establishes measures to protect the aquatic environment and drinking water as well as to reduce the risk in specific areas. Member States have also put in place systems to handle and store pesticides and to treat their packaging and remnants.

In combination with the Sustainable Use Directive, Directives 2006/42 and 2009/127 provide rules on pesticide application equipment ensuring the high environmental requirements and the systems for

regular technical inspection of such machinery. In short, we must test our sprayers.

Finally, even if it is not a new concept, farmers apply Integrated Pest Management. IPM means managing, in a given situation, populations of plant pests, diseases and weeds by the combination of all appropriate agricultural practices. This holistic approach reduces the impact of pests and damage to an acceptable level and at the same time ensures the protection of human health and the environment.

Therefore, we consider farmers are professional users which take care of their crops and the environment.

Based on these facts, Copa and Cogeca strongly believe that it is essential to build confidence in the European food safety system. The European Union has some of the highest standards worldwide to protect both human and animal health and the environment. This is something we have to promote for our common EU interest.

Although farmers are well trained, their spraying equipment is checked, aerial spraying remains a rare exception and farmers make the most out of the available tools they have, the current system for the authorisation and control of pesticide use is not safeguarding the competitiveness of EU agriculture, which is one of the objectives of Regulation 1107/2009.

The reduction of farmers' toolbox endangers their ability to effectively fight against pests and diseases. In addition, availability of proper tools (mechanical, chemical or biological) is a key element to properly implement Integrated Pest Management (IPM).

Normal agronomic practices (crop rotation, seed and variety selection, cultivation practices, sowing dates and densities, irrigation, etc.) are extensively used to control the vast majority of pests and diseases.

Nevertheless, many of these tools are under pressure because of lack of confidence in the EU Institutions and non-science-based decisions, for instance New Breeding Techniques or PPPs. European farmers and their cooperatives need access to these technological advancements in order to meet the upcoming challenges and to remain competitive.

In fact, administrative burdens is leading to concentration of agrochemical companies and disappearance of Small and Medium Enterprises. For the EU farming community it is crucial that we continue investing in this area to bring new and safer products to the market and adapted to the EU agriculture.

Copa-Cogeca has signed a collaboration roadmap with the International Biocontrol Manufacturers Industry (IBMA) in order to increase

availability of low-risk active substances for farmers. Despite the interest from EU farmers to apply low-risk PPPs, availability of such products is clearly far from envisaged.

The development of safer environmental options is crucially important for sectors like organic, which seeks mainstreaming production while facing lower availability of solutions and climate change.

Despite the fact that PPPs are applied in the EU in a safer manner than anywhere worldwide, EU farmers still face a more restrictive approach when approving PPPs. This situation represents a loss of competitiveness at global level resulting from additional costs and the loss of safe and efficient tools (i.e. glyphosate).

Unfortunately, we cannot impose these restrictions to our trading partners if they are not scientifically justified. We are putting up a fight with a hand tied behind our back.

So, as conclusion, we strongly believe that without proper tools on the market which complement existing IPM, European farmers cannot deliver on their commitments, seriously endangering the capacity of EU agriculture to respond to the EU's priorities such as jobs and growth and to ensure safety standards and meet global challenges.

Thank you very much.