

Briefing for HoC Golubiewski CAB WOJCIECHOWSKI/983

MEETING with Art. 4.1(b) - priv.

Bayer AG Art. 4.1(b) - priv.

27/10/2022, 10:00am

HoC office

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SCENE SETTER

- Art. 4.1(b) - priv. at Bayer AG, requested the meeting.
- You will meet with him in person in your office.
- Art. 4.1(b) - priv. wants to share his perspectives on food security, especially in relation to the war in Ukraine.
- Bayer welcomes the vision of the Commission Communication on Food Security.

Art. 4.1(b) - priv., AGRI B3, Tel. Art. 4.1(b) - priv.

TOPIC 3 Sustainable Use of Pesticides Regulation

KEY MESSAGES

Measures included in the Regulation touch on **legally binding targets** at both EU and Member State level to reduce by 50% the use and risk of chemical pesticides and the use of more hazardous pesticides by 2030, **environmentally friendly pest control** through Integrated Pest Management ‘IPM’, a **ban on all pesticide use in sensitive areas, promoting low-risk alternatives, requiring all farmers to access advice and guidance, and enabling the use of new technologies** such as precision farming.

Reassure that the SUR is **about reducing use where possible, not banning use where no viable alternatives exist.**

- There is enough evidence¹ that although the EU food system has achieved high levels of food security, food safety and a wide consumer choice, it is currently not sustainable with respect to environmental, economic and social aspects. Continuing with ‘business as usual’ will significantly endanger natural resources, our health, the climate, and the economy.
- The Green Deal and the ‘Farm to Fork’ Strategy sought to address this with the objective to develop a fair, healthy and environmentally friendly food system.
- The Commission has therefore adopted a proposal on the **revision of the SUD** on 22 June 2022. The future Sustainable Use of pesticides Regulation (SUR) replacing the SUD aims to protect biodiversity, the environment and human health by reducing the use and risk of chemical pesticides and strengthening current legislation to emphasise sustainable and non-chemical pest control under the principle of integrated pest management.
- Significant reductions in chemical pesticide use need not to jeopardise production and put at risk food security. This is about reducing use where possible, optimising use not banning use where no viable alternatives exist. The targets set are for 2030, allowing for the transition to more sustainable agriculture.

¹ E.g., Group of Chief Scientific EU Advisers conclusions in 2020

- The consequences of the Russia's invasion of Ukraine does not make it any less necessary to address the use and risk of pesticides and protect health and the environment².
- The SUR will take into account the different starting points of Member States. In relation to targets, the impact assessment has been conducted and will be published with proposal.
- The availability on the market of low-risk alternatives is a critical element. The Commission will play its part here. It is prioritising work to accelerate the delivery of effective, viable and affordable low risk alternatives on the market e.g., by improving the approvals systems for the main group of biopesticides (micro-organisms).
- The SUR also does not stand-alone. The CAP provides a range of tools to support farmers in their journey to sustainable food production. Member States have to use the CAP tools and need to demonstrate a high level of ambition in their CAP Strategic Plans, in line with the Farm to Fork targets. We must and we will support farmers in this transition and the SUR includes a further possibility of financing through the CAP compulsory practices (which is the case currently only for voluntary practices) during a transition period of 5 years.
- The Commission will count on all parties for support on this initiative, during the negotiations by co-legislators and -after adoption- for its implementation, in line with the shared political ambitions set out in the Green Deal and the demands of EU citizens, as shown in a number of European Citizens' Initiatives on the pesticide topic.

² A recent CEPS report on the EU's response to Russia's war in Ukraine states that the evidence does not suggest that sustainable food production standards should be lowered or those for sustainable food processing and food consumption be revised. Such action could not only create environmental costs but risks amplifying the cyclicity of production and price volatility.

DEVENSIVES (provided by DG SANTE)

What are the main objectives of the revision of the Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive in terms of increasing the sustainability of agriculture production?

- The Sustainable Use of Pesticides proposal is intended to purpose more effectively the same key objective as the current legislation, which is to protect biodiversity, the environment and human health by reducing the use and risk of chemical pesticides across the EU.
- In order to do so, the systematic application of integrated pest management must become the norm.
- Targets are also necessary. This is about reducing the use of chemical pesticides where possible, not about banning their use in situations where no viable alternatives exist.
- We are also working on a range of supporting measures including: supporting the availability on the market of less hazardous pesticides as well as supporting farmers in the transition through the Common Agricultural Policy.

How big will be the impact of the revision on the competitiveness of agriculture production in the EU?

- The current crisis reinforces our conviction that the resilience of our food system requires a fundamental re-orientation of EU agriculture and EU food systems towards sustainability.
- The ambitious goals in our Farm to Fork Strategy are now more relevant than ever. We must reduce our overreliance on inputs, including pesticides and fertilisers, through innovation, agro-ecology and adoption of best practices.
- We are committed to making this transition to sustainable food systems successful so that our food systems reduce their negative impact on climate change and biodiversity loss, while ensuring that farmers and consumers can benefit from it and our long-term food security is safeguarded.

Will a mandatory reduction target of 50% be set, without an impact assessment of what is feasible per Member State and without viable alternatives for their replacement?

- Member States will have some flexibility in establishing national targets, which will allow them to take into account the progress already made in reducing the use and risk of chemical pesticides and the use of more hazardous pesticides.
- We must recall that already under the current Directive, Member States were required to establish national targets; they simply did not.

Does the pesticide target in Farm to Fork collide with the viability of farming?

- No. The target signals the need for more sustainable farming and achieving it will require support to farmers in this transition, with training, guidance and financial support through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).
- We need to maintain viable and competitive agriculture, and with the support under CAP we can move to more environmentally friendly farming with reduced inputs which will be more resilient to shocks.

What is the basis for pesticide targets in F2F Strategy? How will the different Member State starting points be taken into account?

- The Farm to Fork pesticide targets have been established based on the extensive experience gained in the development of the existing Harmonised Risk Indicator and with consideration of significantly reducing the overall use and risk of chemical pesticides.

- The Farm to Fork Strategy makes it clear that ‘the approach will take into account different starting points and differences in improvement potential in the Member States.’
- This is already the case with the Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive where Member States are required to set their own targets for pesticide reduction in National Action Plans. This requirement has been in force for many years but has been implemented to a disappointing extent by Member States.

Farmers cannot be left without means to protect their crops. How will the availability of more low-risk pesticides be supported?

- We need to encourage use of low-risk and biological alternatives. We will expedite phasing-out the more hazardous pesticides and streamline and speed up approval procedures for lower risk products. Efforts are needed on the side of Member States to develop these practices at farm level.
- We are in the process of reviewing data requirements and assessment methodologies for micro-organisms.
- We have also drawn up guidance to facilitate the approval of semi-chemicals and botanicals. Once the work on micro-organisms is concluded, we will consider whether similar action is required.
- If we want to see more alternatives reaching the market, we must invest more resources in the assessment of pesticides. We currently see substantial delays that could be prevented with appropriate resources at national level.

Will the Commission ban the use of pesticides in sensitive areas?

- I think this is indeed a very important issue for our citizens.
- We are considering prohibiting the use of pesticides in sensitive areas, such as certain areas used by the general public (public parks, playgrounds) and in ecologically sensitive areas, such as Natura 2000 sites, to protect human health and the environment.
- There is no reason to use potentially dangerous substances in areas that are used by citizens, including those most vulnerable such as children.
- [Some Member States have raised concerns about a prohibition in Natura 2000 sites] If needed: With regard to Natura 2000 sites, the definition of sensitive areas and the provisions will be discussed, and we can consider then specific Member State circumstances.

Is there an incoherence between the ambitions of Organic Farming Action Plan to increase organic farming and objective of Farm to Fork Strategy to reduce the use of certain candidates for substitution like copper?

- The Farm to Fork targets are complementary. The pesticide targets (to reduce by 50% the use and risk of chemical pesticides) is complemented by the organic target (25% of the EU agricultural land).
- Regarding the use of copper in organic farming, Member States have to refuse authorisations if safer alternatives are available that do not present significant disadvantages.
- Considerable efforts are also undertaken by the organic sector and research institutes to find safer substitutes for copper compounds. All in all, organic agriculture does use less pesticides and generally less hazardous products than conventional agriculture

What is the impact on the F2F Strategy?

- The war in Ukraine does not remove the fact that climate change, biodiversity loss, ecosystem degradation and resource scarcity are some of the biggest threats facing humanity in the next decades. The foundations of our economy are threatened, and the costs of inaction outweighs the costs related to the transition. Sustainability in all its dimensions is fundamental to ensure long-term food security.
- Without a transition such as presented in the Farm to Fork and Biodiversity Strategies, food security will be at risk in the long-term. Natural resources, such as land, healthy soils, water and biodiversity, are key inputs into food production, and their growing scarcity in many parts of the world makes it imperative to use and manage them sustainably.
- Farmers are among the first to witness the impact of climate change, and each year the cost of drought for the EU economy as a whole is estimated at 9 billion euros. At the same time agriculture is one of the few sectors that can store carbon contributing to the goal to be the first climate neutral continent. We cannot afford to delay action; measures taken in the next decade are key to determine the severity of impacts that we will face in the longer term.
- Let us not forget that the Farm to Fork Strategy is also about investing in knowledge and innovation to improve the sustainable productivity of our agricultural sector and that the EU allocated significant funds to this under its Horizon Europe programme. Moreover, the Strategy contains initiatives to facilitate market access for new technologies (biological pesticides, new breeding techniques).
- In addition to finding solutions to the challenges caused in the short and medium term by the war in Ukraine, the Commission is committed to make this transition to sustainable food systems successful so that our food systems reduce their negative impact on climate change and biodiversity loss, while ensuring that farmers and consumers can benefit from it and our long-term food security is safeguarded. The CAP will support farmers in this transition.

Will the F2F targets be reviewed?

- There is an urgent need to improve the long-term resilience of our food system for the next generation.
- The Commission is firmly committed to the Green Deal and the Farm to Fork Strategy and its ambitions and has no intention to review the F2F targets. Resilience and sustainability of our food systems are even more relevant in the current context.
- The Strategy consists of an unprecedented package of initiatives to ensure a fair, healthy and environmentally food system, which will safeguard food security in the future.
- In addition to the crucial initiatives, the targets – based on the latest available scientific evidence - are important markers to where we need to travel as the cost of inaction is simply too high.
- We remain fully focused on the geopolitical realities, and we have our ear on the ground on what stakeholders are saying.
- Sustainability is not optional. It is an urgent necessity to protect our planet.
- Our plans and initiatives may need to wait for a few weeks to land on more fertile ground. However, they will not be abandoned.

Farmers cannot be left without means to protect their crops. How will the availability and use of more low-risk and biological pesticides be supported to replace chemical pesticides?

- The actions under the Farm to Fork Strategy must help us to reduce our dependency on synthetic chemical pesticides. To do so, we must firstly look at plant protection more broadly. We must actively promote the implementation of low pesticide-input management practices such as integrated pest management and organic farming.
- We also need to encourage use of low-risk and biological alternatives. We will expedite phasing-out the more hazardous pesticides and streamline and speed up approval procedures for lower risk products. Efforts are needed on the side of Member States to develop these practices at farm level.
- We are in the process of reviewing data requirements and assessment methodologies for micro-organisms.
- We have already drawn up a specific Guidance aiming at facilitating the approval of semio-chemicals and botanicals. Once the work on micro-organisms is concluded, we will consider whether similar action is required.

How will EU farmers be compensated for the costs of complying with a new requirements when they have to compete with non-EU imports produced to different standards?

- The setting of maximum residue levels on imported products is based on a confirmation from the European Food Safety Authority that the proposed level is safe for consumers. Whenever EFSA finds that, a substance poses a risk for consumers, its approval is not renewed and no import tolerances are granted.
- Whether this leads to unfair competition is an important question that we need to discuss in a broader context, together with our international partners and in the light of our international obligations. The Farm to Fork Strategy sets out how the EU can work globally on shaping a new sustainability agenda.
- I should also remind that the Union’s multiannual financial framework 2021-2027 provides for a very significant budget in support of European agriculture. The Common Agricultural Policy may already provide financial support for farming practices beneficial for the reduction of the use of pesticides. Financing may however concern only voluntary commitments beyond the legal requirements (the “baseline principle”). However since the transition may entail compulsory practices at farm level, the proposed SUR includes the possibility that the CAP finances also compulsory practices during 5 years, by derogation to the “baseline principle”.

How can we make EU rules stricter while not imposing the same rule on imports?

- I understand the criticism that we are raising standards in the EU but not all countries around the world apply the same standards as us. We are working hard with our trade colleagues and international partners to raise the bar globally.
- The transition towards sustainable food systems cannot be successfully achieved by the EU acting alone. For this reason, the Farm to Fork Strategy identifies a series of actions to support a global move towards sustainable food systems.
- At the end of the day, consumers will guide the type of products that are made available in the EU market – including those that are imported. If we collectively seek sustainably produced products, our global partners will surely adapt.
- This is why we must make the sustainable choice the easy choice.

BACKGROUND

PROPOSAL FOR A REGULATION ON THE SUSTAINABLE USE OF PLANT PROTECTION PRODUCTS

The proposal for a Regulation on the Sustainable Use of Plant Protection Products (SUR) will be crucial to achieving the key targets in the Farm to Fork Strategy. It will notably allow a reduction of the use and risk of chemical pesticides by 50%, and the use of more hazardous pesticides, the so-called candidates for substitution, by 50% by 2030.

Initially scheduled for adoption by the College on 23 March, the proposal was adopted on 22 June 2022.

Key measures included in the **Regulation**:

- ✓ **Legally binding targets.** Setting legally binding targets at both EU and Member State level to reduce by 50% the use and risk of chemical pesticides and the use of more hazardous pesticides by 2030. Member States will set their own targets in national law, within agreed criteria.
- ✓ **Environmentally friendly pest control** through Integrated Pest Management 'IPM', an environmentally friendly system of pest control, in which all alternative methods of pest control are first considered, with chemical pesticides only used as a last resort. The new enforcement framework is based on mandatory record keeping for farmers as well as on crop specific rules showing what alternatives can be used.
- ✓ **A ban on all pesticide uses in sensitive areas.** The use of all pesticides is prohibited in sensitive areas, including urban green areas including areas used by the general public such as public parks or gardens, playgrounds, recreation or sports grounds, public paths as well as Natura 2000 areas.

As well as measures:

- ✓ **Promoting low-risk alternatives:** Member States will be required to set a national target to increase non-chemical methods of pest control.
- ✓ **Requiring all farmers to access advice and guidance** for more sustainable farming with less chemical pesticides.
- ✓ **Enabling the use of new technologies** such as precision farming, which contributes to further reducing the use of chemical pesticides.

In parallel with the SUD revision, the Commission is prioritising work to accelerate the delivery of effective, viable and affordable low risk alternatives on the market e.g., by improving the approvals systems for the main group of biopesticides, namely micro-organisms.

Art. 4.1(b) - priv.

