

Friday, 12th December 2008

ENDURE's position on the consequences of the European pesticide policy

The following statement expresses the views of the Executive Committee of ENDURE, a network of excellence contributing to the development of farming systems less reliant on pesticides. ENDURE is committed to providing science-based support to the implementation of the EU Framework Directive on the sustainable use of pesticides.

The strict stand taken by the EU on pesticide legislation calls for a parallel, sustained and equally determined action to promote the design and implementation of new solutions in order to develop Integrated Pest Management schemes that contribute to sustainable development while preserving the competitiveness of European agriculture.

The EU is in the final negotiation phase of a new legislative package on pesticides. The package contains several novel measures. Among them, an upcoming Framework Directive that has reached relatively rapid consensus addresses for the first time the use phase of pesticides. The other major piece of legislation, the Regulation on the placing of plant protection products on the market, introduces cut-off criteria based on hazards rather than risks and the application of the substitution principle.

Divergent opinions have been expressed on the impact of this Regulation on crop protection and production in Europe. The consequences will vary depending on the range of pesticides that remain available. In any case, the diversity of synthetic pesticides will decrease: already 60% of the pesticides have been withdrawn from the European market over the last ten years, part of the remaining active ingredients will be banned by the new Regulation, and the discovery of new compounds by the agrochemical industry is slowing down.

When the legislative package comes into force, Member States will face the challenge of implementing workable crop protection strategies satisfying the requirements of the Framework Directive with a less diverse set of pesticides available due to the Regulation. The management of pests' resistance to pesticides and the protection of minor crops where previously used pesticides no longer enjoy authorisation are two areas where the concern is particularly acute. But the challenge must become an opportunity to develop a diversity of methods and strategies as alternatives to single-solution chemically-based crop protection. An in-depth reconsideration of crop protection solutions in European agriculture cannot be avoided.

ENDURE has been selected by the EC as the network of excellence providing the support to research and extension that is needed to facilitate reduced reliance on the use of plant protection products in Europe. ENDURE researchers are currently conducting studies on the main pest, disease and weed problems affecting arable, perennial and protected crops that are responsible for the highest use of pesticides throughout Europe.



Results already obtained indicate that there is significant potential to reduce the risks due to pesticide use by introducing new technologies, to reduce the use of pesticides by adopting alternative methods, and to reduce the reliance on pesticides by improving cropping systems and by establishing healthy crops less vulnerable to pests and less likely to elicit pest outbreaks. These studies also point to the fact that only a limited subset of the technologies and alternative solutions required to reach these goals are currently available on the market.

Among its objectives, ENDURE is committed to providing science-based support to the implementation of the Framework Directive on the sustainable use of pesticides, especially to Article 13 that makes the implementation of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) compulsory for all EU agriculture by 2014.

IPM creates synergies by integrating complementary methods drawing from a diverse array of approaches that include biocontrol agents, plant genetics, cultural and mechanical methods, biotechnologies, and information technologies, together with some pesticides still needed to address the most problematic pests and face critical situations.

Importantly, such a diversity of solutions is also needed for sustainability purposes: the continuous use of a single method to control a

given pest, be it the most favourable solution initially, will rapidly induce pest populations to evolve and overcome this method, whether a chemical one or not.

ENDURE sees IPM as a continuously improving process in which innovative solutions are integrated and locally adapted as they emerge and contribute to reducing reliance on pesticides in agricultural systems. To face the rapid decrease in chemical options, very significant efforts are urgently needed to increase the range of effective and affordable solutions. This requires a coordinated plan to:

- encourage public and private research on new crop protection technologies and facilitate the regulatory conditions for their availability on the market,
- support multidisciplinary research on whole systems—an emerging field—as a way to design truly innovative IPM strategies,
- develop information, education and recognition of these integrated strategies for the benefit of farmers, advisers and other actors of the food chain, including the general public,
- maintain a momentum at the European level to create synergies from national efforts.

In conclusion, ENDURE stresses the fact that the strict stand taken by the EU on pesticide legislation calls for a parallel, sustained and equally determined action to promote the design and implementation of new solutions in order to develop IPM schemes that contribute to sustainable development while preserving the competitiveness of European agriculture.

