Plant protection products: sustainable use of pesticides

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PURPOSE : to launch a public debate on a thematic strategy on the sustainable use of pesticides.
CONTENT : this Communication represents a major step in the preparation of the Thematic Strategy on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides. The main objectives of the thematic strategy are: - to minimise the hazards and risks to health and environment from the use of pesticides; - to improve controls on the use and distribution of pesticides; - to reduce the levels of harmful active substances, in particular by replacing the most dangerous by safer (including non-chemical) alternatives; - to encourage the use of low-input or pesticide-free crop farming; - to establish a transparent system for reporting and monitoring progress including the development of appropriate indicators. The current situation in the Community and the Member States is presented on the basis of the available preparatory work. This includes quantitative data on PPP use and the benefits, costs and risks associated with their use. There is a short summary of policies and initiatives already in place in some Member States, which are not yet co-ordinated, and a review of available statistics and indicators. The core chapter of the Communication suggests several possible measures addressing the five above-mentioned objectives, which could become part of the thematic strategy, and states the Commission's preferences as to which measures could be proposed. The Community and the Member States, in implementing such a strategy, could use many different instruments: legally binding measures, (economic) incentives, research or voluntary measures. Combination of all types of instruments is also possible. Many measures could most effectively be integrated in already existing or currently developing related policy areas, such as water protection, health and consumer protection (in particular food safety) and the Common Agricultural Policy. It is obvious that most of the proposed measures fall currently within the purview of the Member States. This is the case for actions concerning Codes of Good Farming Practices, the promotion of IPM, training programmes for users, further promotion of organic farming and low-input agriculture and the application of penalties including the reduction or even cancellation of benefits from the CAP. In order to achieve a higher level of harmonisation and better implementation, it might, however, be necessary to define minimum requirements at Community level. Some of the proposed measures could be most efficiently regulated at Community level (in close co-operation with Member States), such as the definition of adequate monitoring requirements, collection of use data and harmonised systems to report any incidents related to health or the environment. Public consultation on a future thematic strategy for the sustainable use of pesticides is proposed on the basis of these options. The Commission hereby invites all interested parties to discuss and comment on this document. A public hearing will be organised in the 4 th quarter of 2002. On the basis of the analyses developed in this Communication and the outcome of the consultation process, the Commission will propose at the beginning of 2004 all necessary measures setting out a comprehensive Community Thematic Strategy on theSustainable Use of Pesticides.