Plant protection products: sustainable use of pesticides

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Kathleen VAN BREMPT (PES, B) in response to the Commission communication on a thematic strategy on the sustainable use of pesticides. Pointing out that the use of pesticides had steadily risen since 1996, the report reiterated Parliament's previous call for a revision of pesticides legislation with a view to pesticide risk reduction, backed by "urgent and mandatory complementary action" on reducing the use of pesticides. It condemned the Commission's "lack of ambition" in its consultation paper and called for clear goals and timetables for each Member State, with a 50% cut in use within 10 years as an "overall and indicative" target. The Commission was also urged to extend the scope of the strategy to non-agricultural pesticides. To help bring about this reduction in pesticide use, the committee called for a regulatory framework for taxes and /or other levies on pesticides and supported the Commission's plan to stop Member States from reducing VAT on pesticides. It also wanted producers or importers to assume responsibility for the recovery and safe disposal of all pesticide packaging, pesticides past their expiry date and revoked pesticide products, with a mandatory deposit-refund system. The report called for compulsory protection zones for all surface water at European level and a mandatory safety distance of 3 metres. On the thorny issue of GMOs, it urged "the importance of the precautionary principle" and noted that GMOs were not proven to be a sustainable alternative. Other recommendations included: - designating "pesticide vulnerable zones" where use is banned or severely restricted, such as drinking water collection or abstraction zones and areas protected under the Habitats and Birds directives; - more EU funding for research into developing alternative pest control methods and systems; - greater information for consumers, through regular publication of measurements of residues in fresh food products from supermarkets and other retail outlets; - strengthening financial incentives for conversion to low-input and organic farming.