Thematic strategy on the sustainable use of pesticides

2007/2006(INI) - 26/06/2007

The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety adopted the own-initiative report by Irena **BELOHORSKA** (NI, SK) in response to the Commission's communication on the "Thematic Strategy on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides".

The report acknowledges the need for a European legal framework in the field of pesticide use as legislation in force has not proved sufficient to achieve the prevention of the hazards and risks to health and environment posed by the use of pesticides and considers it important to adopt new legislation based on an approach more firmly centred on reducing pesticide use and more ambitious in terms of environmental performance, through the provision of meaningful support for organic farming and integrated production methods.

The report welcomes numerous measures introduced by the Commission, supports the substitution principle, ban on aerial spraying, prohibition of reduced VAT rates, enhanced protection of the aquatic environment, designation of zones with reduced or zero pesticide use. It welcomes in general the measures chosen by the Commission. It stresses, however, that ambitious National Action Plans of the Member States are key elements in the whole process. It regrets, furthermore, that the Commission opted for the exclusion of quantitative and qualitative criteria in the National Action Plans, thus reducing their level of ambition. It suggests that the Commission should combine the elimination of hazards, risks and dependence on pesticides with quantitative criteria in the National Action Plans, by stipulating that Member States must set their own national targets, timetables and criteria for reducing pesticide use.

MEPs regret that, although pesticides are linked to immunological effects, endocrine-disrupting effects, neurotoxic disorders and cancer, health is only marginally mentioned in the Thematic Strategy. They emphasise that substances which are carcinogenic, mutagenic or toxic to reproduction, or persistent, bio-accumulative or toxic, or which show endocrine disrupting properties, must not be approved as active substances in pesticides. They also point out that foetuses, infants, children as well as pregnant women, the elderly, the chronically sick and those with pre-existing medical problems are more vulnerable and more exposed to pesticides, especially to cumulative effects of different types of pesticides, than the rest of the population.

The committee believes that designation of zones, including drinking water catchment protection areas, with reduced or zero pesticide use and enhanced protection of the aquatic environment from pollution by pesticides are necessary in order to avoid unwanted exposure. It considers that "buffer zones" of appropriate width taking account of the different agricultural, geographical and weather conditions should be established; considers that the use of pesticides should be prohibited in and around residential areas, public parks, sports grounds, school grounds and children's playgrounds, as the Commission has recognised that the risks to the general public from exposure to pesticides in such areas are high.

It also welcomes the creation of a system of training and education for professional pesticide users, for which the Commission should draw up guidelines which take account of the differences which exist between the various European regions. It considers that certification and training must be a prerequisite for the employment of professional pesticide users and that ongoing professional development should also be provided, in order to update their technical skills and knowledge and to ensure safe and effective use of pesticides. It suggests that advisory services to farmers be set up or enhanced in order to increase their awareness concerning safe use of pesticides and encourage the exchange of good practices.

The Commission is invited, inter alia, to : i) to formulate a protection and cooperation policy vis-à-vis the EU's neighbours, on the use of pesticides and PPPs; ii) specify the European financial aid that can be harnessed by Member States to conduct studies, compile databases and enhance knowledge concerning pesticides; iii) work together with the Member States and the industry, to take measures to prevent the import and marketing of counterfeit and/or unauthorised PPPs; iv) ensure that when levels of pesticides which exceed the relevant limit values are found on and in imported foodstuffs the same measures are taken and the same penalties are imposed as in the case of products manufactured in the EU; take immediate steps to be taken to ensure that sufficiently frequent checks are carried out on imported goods (which are generally subject to less strict legislation on the use of PPPs meaning that there is a higher risk of illegal residue levels) in all Member States in the same way, so that European farmers and manufacturers are not placed at a disadvantage and a level playing field is established within the EU; v) call for appropriate controls and a ban on imports into the EU of foodstuffs produced using PPPs and pesticides whose use and marketing are not permitted in the EU; vi) set up coordinated systems for the collection of information on the production, import, export, sale, distribution and use of generally available pesticides; vii) speed up Community harmonisation of maximum residue levels, as the current situation means that there is an uneven playing field within the EU, hampering trade and confusing consumers; viii) set maximum residue levels as low as possible unless it can be proved that even the best techniques and methods available cannot prevent residue below a certain level; in this regard calls for Member States to improve the monitoring of pesticide concentrations in food products and environmental media; propose clear definitions and minimum criteria for IPM, including the increasing percentage of areas under organic farming in Europe and applying compulsory general and crop-specific IPM standards to all cultivated land except land under organic farming.

The Member States are invited to: i) setting up a system of taxes or levies in order to influence - quantitatively and qualitatively - pesticide use; ii) introduce taxes or charges on pesticides as measures facilitating the development of general and specific Integrated Pest Management (IPM) methods and practices; considers that Member States must consider the introduction of a system of levies on pesticides in order to finance education, training and the overall implementation of the National Action Plans; iii) promote low pesticide-input farming and organic farming, and ensure that professional users of pesticides shift towards a more environment-friendly use of all available crop protection products, giving priority to non-chemical alternatives, crop rotation and weeding rather than to systematic use of pesticides; iv) ensure the safe storage and handling of pesticides, and that unused, past-expiry pesticides and empty packaging are collected in a controlled way and obsolete pesticides are treated in accordance with the rules for hazardous waste.

Members also call for coordinated systems for the collection of information on the production, import, export, sale, distribution and use of generally available pesticides.