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Thematic strategy on the sustainable use of pesticides

European Parliament resolution of 24 October 2007 on a Thematic Strategy on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides (2007/2006(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: 'A Thematic Strategy on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides' (COM(2006)0372),
- having regard to Decision No 1600/2002/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 July 2002 laying down the Sixth Community Environment Action Programme⁽¹⁾,
- having regard to the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a framework for Community Action to achieve a sustainable use of pesticides (COM(2006)0373),
- having regard to the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning the placing of plant protection products on the market (COM(2006)0388),
- having regard to the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning statistics on plant protection products (COM(2006)0778),
- having regard to Article 175 of the Treaty,
- having regard to Article 6 of the Treaty, by virtue of which environmental protection must be integrated into the definition and implementation of the Community policies in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development,
- having regard to Regulation (EC) No 396/2005 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 February 2005 on maximum residue levels of pesticides in or on food and feed of plant and animal origin⁽²⁾,
- having regard to Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy⁽³⁾ ('Framework Directive on water policy'), Council Directive 98/83/EC of 3 November 1998 on the quality of water intended for human consumption⁽⁴⁾, Council Directive 75/440/EEC of 16 June 1975 concerning the quality required of surface water intended for the abstraction of drinking water in the Member States⁽⁵⁾ and Directive 2006/118/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 December 2006 on the protection of groundwater against pollution and deterioration⁽⁶⁾,

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 242, 10.9.2002, p. 1.

⁽²⁾ OJ L 70, 16.3.2005, p. 1.

⁽³⁾ OJ L 327, 22.12.2000, p. 1.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ L 330, 5.12.1998, p. 32.

⁽⁵⁾ OJ L 194, 25.7.1975, p. 26.

⁽⁶⁾ OJ L 372, 27.12.2006, p. 19.

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- having regard to Regulation (EC) No 1907/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 concerning the Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH) and establishing a European Chemicals Agency ⁽¹⁾ and Directive 2006/121/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 amending Council Directive 67/548/EEC on the approximation of laws, regulations and administrative provisions relating to the classification, packaging and labelling of dangerous substances in order to adapt it to Regulation (EC) No 1907/2006 ⁽²⁾,
 - having regard to Directive 2004/35/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 April 2004 on environmental liability with regard to the prevention and remedying of environmental damage ⁽³⁾, Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora ⁽⁴⁾ and Council Directive 79/409/EEC of 2 April 1979 on the conservation of wild birds ⁽⁵⁾,
 - having regard to the synthesis report of the Commission and of the Dutch ministries of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment and of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries entitled 'Possibilities for Future EU Environmental Policy on Plant Protection Products' (1997),
 - having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety and the opinion of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (A6-0291/2007),
- A. whereas the use of plant protection products (PPPs) in the EU between 1992 and 2003 remained significant and has not decreased despite the proactive policies successfully pursued in some Member States to reduce the use of farm pesticides,
- B. whereas undesirable amounts of certain pesticides can still be found in the environment, in particular in soil and water; whereas residues exceeding regulatory limit values are still found in agricultural produce,
- C. whereas although the benefits which derive from the use of pesticides and the role they play in ensuring an efficient and sustainable competitive agricultural production in Europe are undeniable, the general public should be better informed on the possible health and environmental risks and short and long-term adverse effects related to their use;
- D. whereas continued use of pesticides should be possible only if the precautionary principle is upheld with regard to both human health and the protection of the water and land ecosystem; whereas this means that pesticides should not be used before all impact assessments regarding health and the environment have been carried out; and whereas comparing data and best practices in use reduction in the different Member States should be encouraged and taken into account as a point of reference,
- E. whereas a transparent system for reporting and monitoring pesticide use and residue levels in products, including the development of appropriate indicators, is lacking;
1. 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;
2. 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;

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 396, 30.12.2006, p. 1.

⁽²⁾ OJ L 396, 30.12.2006, p. 850. Corrigendum published in OJ L 136, 29.5.2007, p. 281.

⁽³⁾ OJ L 143, 30.4.2004, p. 56.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ L 206, 22.7.1992, p. 7.

⁽⁵⁾ OJ L 103, 25.4.1979, p. 1.

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3. Welcomes the Thematic Strategy on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides ('Thematic Strategy') which identifies the shortcomings of current Community legislation and proposes to regulate the use phase to 'fill the gap' between the placing of PPPs on the market on the one hand and the end of life-cycle of such products on the other;
4. Points out that the EU has now adopted more than a dozen legal acts which directly or indirectly regulate the use of PPPs; stresses, however, that the proposed provisions governing the use of PPPs are leading in the right direction;
5. Notes that the Thematic Strategy covers only PPPs, which constitute only a part of pesticides; calls on the Commission forthwith to include pest control products (biocidal product types 14-19) as defined in Annex V to Directive 98/8/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 February 1998 concerning the placing of biocidal products on the market⁽¹⁾ within the scope of the Thematic Strategy, as they pose similar risks to human health and the environment, and urges the Commission to extend the scope of the Thematic Strategy to include other biocides as soon as possible;
6. Considers it essential to improve the behaviour of pesticide users in order to avoid misuse, overuse and poisoning accidents; 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; 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; 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;
7. Calls on the Commission to consider, in accordance with the polluter-pays principle, suitable ways of involving manufacturers of PPPs and/or their active agents in the work of dealing with or remedying the damage to human health or the environment which might be caused by the use of PPPs;
8. Recommends that the sale and distribution of pesticides be performed under the supervision of a qualified professional or practitioner, and that those transactions be recorded in a register to ensure adequate control of the marketing and use of such products;
9. Stresses that minimisation of the hazards and risks to health and environment from the use of pesticides cannot be effectively achieved without a constructive dialogue and capacity building, including financial stimulation, with third countries together with stringent checks on products imported into the EU to ensure a level playing field for competition;
10. Calls on the Commission to formulate a protection and cooperation policy vis-à-vis the EU's neighbours, on the use of pesticides and PPPs;
11. Emphasises the importance of the media's role in informing the general public, and non-professional users of pesticides in particular, about pesticide issues; and suggests that public information and awareness-raising campaigns be devised;
12. Welcomes in general the measures chosen by the Commission; stresses, however, that ambitious National Action Plans of the Member States are key elements in the whole process;
13. 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;
14. Stresses that without quantitative use reduction targets in the National Action Plans, the notion 'reduction of hazards, risks and dependence on pesticides' is very imprecisely and ambiguously defined, and will not push the Member States to lower the amount of pesticides used or to prioritise non-chemical alternatives for plant protection and pest and crop management;

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 123, 24.4.1998, p. 1.

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15. 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, taking into account the positive experience from some Member States which already use quantitative reduction targets, which has demonstrated that pesticide use can be reduced without significant costs to farmers;
16. Stresses that a commitment to curb the use of PPPs to make them less dangerous and to seek alternative plant protection products, resources and methods which are more environmentally friendly and less harmful to humans and animals will, in addition to environmental and public health benefits, improve the quality of European agricultural products and increase their added value as a result of widespread public awareness and consumer sensitivity regarding these issues;
17. Agrees that National Action Plans should be adapted to the specific climatic, agricultural and pest conditions of each Member State, where certain specific treatments are necessary and particularly in the case of minor crops;
18. Hopes that the Commission will specify the Community financial aid that can be harnessed by Member States to conduct studies, compile databases and enhance knowledge concerning pesticides;
19. Welcomes the statement by the Commission that the most important expected outcome of the Thematic Strategy is the reduction of the negative impacts of pesticide use on human health;
20. Regrets that, although pesticides are linked to immunological effects, endocrine-disrupting effects, neurotoxic disorders and cancer⁽¹⁾, health is only marginally mentioned in the Thematic Strategy;
21. Emphasises 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;
22. Points out that fetuses, infants, children as well as pregnant women, the elderly, the chronically sick and those with pre-existing medical problems, as well as users of pesticides and rural residents and communities, are more vulnerable and more exposed to pesticides, especially to cumulative effects of different types of pesticides, than the rest of the population;
23. Points out that prior authorisation of a PPP is a precondition for its use and that such authorisation is based on a scientific assessment of the PPP and its active agents in the course of which the product is tested to determine what risks it poses, when properly used, to human and animal health and the environment;
24. Considers it essential to conduct further research into the health effects of pesticide use, and particularly of combined and cumulative use;
25. Warmly welcomes the banning of substances on the basis of their intrinsic hazards and the so-called 'substitution principle' whereby the more dangerous substances will be removed from the market where safer, including non-chemical, alternatives exist;
26. Calls on the Commission, working together with the Member States and the industry, to take measures to prevent the import and marketing of counterfeit and/or unauthorised PPPs;
27. Calls on the Commission to 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; calls for 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;

⁽¹⁾ Commission Communication entitled 'European Environment and Health Strategy', COM(2003)0338, p. 5.

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28. Calls 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;
29. Calls for coordinated systems for the collection of information on the production, import, export, sale, distribution and use of generally available pesticides;
30. 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; 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 urban 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;
31. Notes the contamination of European groundwater and surface waters by pesticides and stresses the need to strengthen the cohesion of the Thematic Strategy with the Framework Directive on water policy; points out that water purifying, however, is mostly carried out only for human consumption, whereas the rest of the contaminated water gets into the human body from flora and fauna, giving rise subsequently to high treatment costs;
32. Recognises that the ban on aerial spraying is inevitable; considers, however, that spraying can be used where it presents clear environmental advantages or where there are no viable alternatives, but that at the same time it should be obligatory to notify the general public about the time of spraying, the amounts and the type of pesticide;
33. Calls on the Commission to 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;
34. Urges the Commission to 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;
35. Welcomes the proposed invitation to Member States to eliminate provisions allowing Member States to apply reduced VAT rates for pesticides; considers that the Commission should help Member States to introduce appropriate support measures for farmers, to be financed under rural development;
36. Calls on the Commission to support the Member States in setting up a system of taxes or levies in order to influence — quantitatively and qualitatively — pesticide use;
37. Insists that the Commission propose clear definitions and minimum criteria for IPM, taking into account 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;
38. Acknowledges that numerous environmental concerns have been integrated into the various regulations which make up the Common Agricultural Policy, thereby making agricultural production methods more environment-friendly;
39. Points to the need for the dissemination of farming practices promoting the use of lower pesticide doses (among other things, integrated production and organic farming), which will contribute to an overall decrease in pesticide use;

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40. Urges the Member States to 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 methods, giving priority to non-chemical methods of plant protection and pest and crop management, for example crop rotation and weeding rather than to systematic use of pesticides;
 41. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to make adequate resources available for resistance research, for the cultivation and supply of a wide range of crops with various resistance characteristics, for research into crop rotation and soil cultivation methods to combat pests and plant diseases and for innovations in the area of plant protection, including non-chemical alternatives;
 42. Stresses that global warming is likely to lead to increased pest populations which may increase the frequency and the intensity of outbreaks; in this respect calls for examination of impacts of climate change not only on agricultural production but also in the context of environmental protection;
 43. Calls on the Member States to 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;
 44. Calls for existing Community funding to be used for the safe disposal of obsolete pesticides, given that within the EU more than 200 000 tonnes of pesticides are still being stored in both underground dumps and open-air stockpiles;
 45. Recognises that well-maintained application equipment is essential for reducing the adverse impacts of pesticides on health and the environment, particularly as regards the workers, farmers and residents concerned, and stresses that application equipment must be regularly checked;
 46. Urges the Commission to take into account the extremely worrying issue of mortality amongst domestic bees — a problem associated with the use of certain systemic insecticides (containing the active substances Fipronil and Imidacloprid) in order to treat sunflower and maize seeds;
 47. Stresses the need to amend European trading standards relating to the shape, size and aesthetic qualities of fresh fruit and vegetables, which encourage the intensive use of pesticides;
 48. Urges the Commission to design the Thematic Strategy as an umbrella for existing and future legislation; suggests proposing an enforceable mix of instruments that are not contradictory but complementary to each other;
 49. Welcomes the fact that, on the basis of the Thematic Strategy, the Commission has put forward a comprehensive Community legal framework for measures designed to bring about the sustainable use of PPPs;
 50. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and to the parliaments and governments of the Member States.
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