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EC plant protection package of measures enters into force

Environmental protection given support

The EU has adopted new legislation on plant protection. The new regulations about the authorisation and use of plant protection agents represent a giant leap for environmental protection in Europe. "The new directive about authorisation bans the application of especially hazardous ingredients in plant protection products. This is long overdue and now marks progress in preventive environmental protection", said Jochen Flasbarth, President of the Federal Environment Agency. A framework directive on the sustainable use of pesticides will benefit the environment. For the first time ever in Europe, a single framework has been created by which to reduce the associated risks to man and the environment of pesticide use.

Substances with problematic properties will, as a rule, no longer be authorised in plant protection products. This includes substances that are very hazardous to the environment: in addition to the internationally outlawed POPs, this also applies to substances which are very slow to biodegrade, accumulate in living organisms (and thus in the food chain), and are also (eco-) toxic (so-called PBTs - persistent, bioaccumulative and toxic). Substances that are carcinogenic, endocrine disruptors, or mutagenic to man and animals will also be banned in future. To be able to apply the new regulations in practice the Federal Environment Agency and its counterpart authorities in the other EU states are developing suitable assessment and evaluation methods. Jochen Flasbarth said, "We must separate the wheat from the chaff and ensure that criteria are designed so that a ban actually affects those substances which can cause damage to the environment. Especially as concerns endocrine disruptors, we are still lacking the tools with which to implement the ban."

On the other hand the new framework directive on the sustainable use of pesticides focuses specifically on environmental problems caused by plant protection products that cannot be regulated by an authorisation procedure. As a result, many farmers in Europe still spread more pesticides than is actually necessary for a good harvest. Violations of environmental laws also still occur too often. Yet another problem results from attempts to eliminate field weeds and pests: birds such as the partridge or the skylark no longer find enough food to feed their young. The directive commits Member States to create the necessary conditions for farmers to work with methods that can do with fewer pesticides. In addition to organic farming, there is also so-called integrated plant protection. Spraying from helicopters will also be banned, save for a few exceptional cases. Every EC Member State must lay out concrete targets, measures

and a timetable for a National Action Plan (NAP) to mitigate the risks and impact of plant protection product use on man and the environment. This may include integrating a protective strip of land along bodies of water so as to limit any input of pesticides. The Federal Environment Agency also works to promote suitable compensatory measures in cases where pesticide use can not be avoided so as not to jeopardise the populations of bird and mammal species typical of our agricultural landscape.

The goals and measures necessary to protect the environment as well as statutory regulations must be clearly identified in National Action Plans. Jochen Flasbarth comments, "We may not leave it at mere appeals and recommendations; instead we must clearly describe the requirements and set binding targets so that the use of plant protection products is reduced to the absolute necessary minimum." The Federal Environment Agency also participates actively in the implementation process.

The new regulations on plant protection were published in the Official Journal of the European Union on 24 November 2009:

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2009:309:0001:0050:EN:PDF>
and

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2009:309:0071:0086:EN:PDF>

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