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FACT SHEET

The Future of European Agriculture

“Cut-Off Criteria” and the proposed new Regulation concerning the placing of pesticides on the market

For nearly two decades, the 91/414/EEC Directive has standardised the agrochemical substances used by European farmers to keep crops healthy, protect them from pests and diseases, and to safeguard the environment and consumers.

The proposed new regulation for authorising pesticides, set to replace the Authorisation Directive 91/414/EEC of 15 July 1991, is now under revision awaiting second reading in the European Parliament and Council. One of the contentious issues under discussion in the new regulation is the proposal to include ‘Cut-Off’ (rejection) criteria.

The New Pesticide Regulation

Currently, the marketing and use of pesticides is regulated by Directive 91/414/EEC. Under this legislation, only active substances that are included in a positive EU list of authorised substances can be used in pesticides. In order to be included in this positive list, active substances must pass numerous strict risk assessments, that look at whether a substance is safe for both human health and the environment. Once a substance is included in the positive EU list, Member States may authorise the use of products containing them.

In July 2006, the European Commission proposed a **new Regulation** concerning the placing of pesticides on the market, including **“Cut-Off” Criteria** that would ban the use of many active substances based on hazard measurements alone, instead of considering the risk assessment. In October 2007, the European Parliament revised the Commission’s draft Regulation and presented amendments including additional Cut-Off criteria that would ban many more active substances.

Whilst the Council reviewed the proposed amendments, to facilitate the decision-making process, the European Commission issued a revised proposal on 11 March 2008 that refused the additional Cut-Off criteria as proposed by the Parliament. A political agreement at Council level was reached in June 2008, which is broadly in line with the Commission position on Cut-Off criteria.

The “Cut-Off” criteria proposed would ban the use of many active substances based solely on whether a substance presents a hazard; the hazard is however identified at high doses - not the very low doses under realistic conditions of use. Taking a purely hazard based approach means, for example, that also vitamins A and D would have to be banned because if consumed in high quantities they can be harmful. In fact, if the Parliament’s additional Cut-Off criteria are adopted into law, up to 85% of the active substances used in pesticides and the sale of more than 90% of insecticides used in agriculture today could be banned.

Impact on the Agriculture Industry

The proposed revisions to the legislation will impact the quality of European food, the source of Europe's agricultural products, and prices of fruit, vegetables and other staples.

The ban on some of the main active components of fungicides, herbicides and insecticides will leave farmers with few or no alternatives to grow affordable and high-quality crops. Simply put, European crops would be at risk of disease; farming and production costs would increase; farmers would face significant yield losses and consumers would face higher food prices.

A recent study by Nomisma, an independent Italian research institute, estimates that should the proposed Cut-Off criteria become law, EU yields could be reduced by 2020 for wheat (-29%), potatoes (-33%), cereals (-20%) and wine grapes (-10%). A separate study by the UK agency, ADAS supports those forecasts.

The Commission's impact assessment did not include the proposed Cut-Offs and, as such, the real EU-level impact of the new legislative proposals is still not known.

What would it mean for consumers?

European consumers increasingly demand locally-produced food. But if Cut-Off criteria are imposed, plant protection solutions across the EU will be at risk, and European crops would be more vulnerable to pests and diseases. As a result, imported food will likely replace European-grown crops.

An example:

The potato is a highly important staple crop that is grown all over Europe. "Late blight" – a fungal disease – can destroy up to 100% of crops within 48 hours if left untreated. The use of fungicides by farmers is already strictly regulated. Further reductions of available fungicides, or imposed use limitations, may result in devastating yield losses which will increase costs to farmers and the food chain. Ultimately consumers will feel the impact in their pockets.

ECPA's Position

Each country currently has quality control mechanisms in place to regulate pesticides. The European Crop Protection Association (ECPA) urges the European Commission and the Council to understand that *the fact that an active substance contains a substance classified as hazardous does not indicate that the product is unsafe* (provided that farmers follow treatment, storage and disposal recommendations). Whether or not a substance is safe depends on how it is used. It is important to base pesticides authorisations on risk assessment principles – considering both the hazard **and** potential exposure.

ECPA calls for:

- **European regulators to maintain an authorisation system which is based on a scientific risk assessment of the product rather than on the potential hazard of substances alone, i.e. to limit the use of hazard-based Cut-Offs.**
- **the European Commission to conduct a European assessment of the impact of the proposed Cut-Offs on the ability to protect crops and the impact on food safety, food prices and availability, before the new regulation is adopted in order to allow legislators to make fully informed decisions.**

NOTE TO EDITORS:

The European Crop Protection Association (ECPA) represents the crop protection industry interests at European level. Its members include all major companies and national associations across Europe. For more information: www.ecpa.eu.