

Agriculture Ministers reach political agreement on controversial new legislation on plant protection products

Europe's Ministers for Agriculture finally managed to clinch a compromise and reached a political agreement on the controversial new legislation for the authorisation and marketing of plant protection products. This had seemed doubtful until the last moment as some principal differences had prevailed not only between Member States but particularly between Member States and the European Commission.

"We welcome the agreement as it is the precondition for concluding this difficult legislative process still within the term of this Commission and Parliament" said Garlich v. Essen, Secretary General of the European Seed Association. Once the political agreement has been formalised by a Council Common Position (expected for September), the issue will be debated again in second reading by the European Parliament and von Essen sees difficult discussions ahead before a final agreement will be reached.

"The new text is clearly an improvement in comparison to the original Commission proposal and also the Parliament's first draft. It provides flexibility for Member States to take over existing authorisations and establishes a much more workable mutual recognition procedure. And, most importantly for the seed industry, it finally provides a clear legal base for treated seed that is in line with the existing EU seed marketing Directives."

But at the same time, the seed sector as well as farmers, crop protection companies and many experts are worried about the rigid cut-off criteria that are believed to lead to a critical diminution of available crop protection solutions and may risk to seriously damage resistance management in a large number of crops.

"Less choice means less specific and tailored possibilities to combat pests and diseases" von Essen points out. "This may well and quite quickly lead to significant crop losses – at times when food and feed prices are rising anyway." Although the Council agreed on a 5 year period during which products may still be maintained in case no alternatives are available, it is uncertain if this provision will find the approval of the European Parliament. Still, seed, crop protection and food industry together with farmers will work for practical improvements with Member of Parliament and national Ministries over the coming months. Garlich v. Essen is optimistic: "I am convinced that we can have a better regulation of plant protection, for the benefit of the environment, of consumers and the agro-food sector alike. But we need to be practical and make sure that we still can produce the increasing amount of food Europe and the world need, with products that are safe under their respective conditions of use. Risking that for the sheer sake of reducing numbers is not a good policy".

Further information on ESA's position on the revision of the plant protection legislation can be obtained from the General Secretariat. Please contact us by mail or phone (click 'Contact' on this site).