

Dear Commissioner, dear Ministers,

We, the undersigned, welcome the proposal outlined by Mr Hogan to the July AGRI Council¹, to amend the delegated act² on Greening that would prevent the use of pesticides on Ecological Focus Area (EFAs). This is part of the “better regulation” simplification package.

The aim of any REFIT or simplification review is rightly to ensure legislation is fit for purpose. The intention of the EFAs, listed under “*practices beneficial for the climate and the environment*”, was “*to safeguard and improve biodiversity on farms*”³, boosting natural processes and so strengthening the ecosystem functions that are essential for the long term productivity and intrinsic fertility of our food production systems.

These natural processes, many of which are alarmingly weak across most conventional systems, include pollination, topsoil formation, nutrient cycling and carbon sequestration, regulation of the water cycle that reduces flood and drought risk, as well as controlling and regulating pest populations via predation.

These processes all depend upon biodiversity. The greater the abundance and variety of species, the stronger and more resilient are these emergent ecosystem functions, provided “for free” for farmers.

Therefore it stands to reason that actions impeding the development of that diversity and delivery of those processes ought not to be permitted on the EFAs. Pesticides can have non-target effects that impact upon a wide range of bacteria, fungi and invertebrates. So it makes sense that such collateral damage should be avoided if the EFA measure is to be effective and fit for purpose.

Furthermore a recent EP resolution on the EU’s Biodiversity Strategy stressed “*that EFAs should in principle be areas for the protection and promotion of agro-ecological processes such as pollination and soil conservation*”⁴. Likewise, a recent opinion by the European Economic and Social Committee noted that “*the fact that the use of pesticides is to some extent*

¹ Discussion in Agriculture & Fisheries Council in Brussels 18th July 2016, press background www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/agrifish/2016/07/background-agri_en_pdf/ and preparatory documents SWD(2016) 218: <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-11025-2016-INIT/en/pdf> and <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10475-2016-REV-1/en/pdf> Commission staff working document - Review of greening after one year http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/direct-support/pdf/2016-staff-working-document-greening_en.pdf based on the roadmap http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/roadmaps/docs/2016_agri_016-017_eco_focus_area_en.pdf

² Commission delegated regulation (EU) No 639/2014 of 11 March 2014 supplementing Regulation (EU) No 1307/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing rules for direct payments to farmers under support schemes within the framework of the common agricultural policy and amending Annex X to that Regulation [2014] OJ L 181/1, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32014R0639&from=en>

³ Recital 37, 44 and art.46(1), Regulation (EU) 1307/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 establishing rules for direct payments to farmers under support schemes within CAP, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013R1307&from=en>

⁴ Article 40, European Parliament resolution of 2 February 2016 on the mid-term review of the EU’s Biodiversity Strategy, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&language=EN&reference=P8-TA-2016-0034>

*permitted in ecological focus areas is diametrically opposed to the intention of greening agricultural policy: pesticides do not help to increase biodiversity but rather limit it.”*⁵ In the process of CAP reform, many MEPs joined with NGOs⁶ to voice their concerns about the loophole and lack of coherence that allowed pesticide use on EFAs. Therefore we welcome the move by the Commission to make the legislation fit for purpose by not allowing pesticide application on EFAs, making them work for farmers, society and nature.

As for concerns about provisions for leguminous and protein crops, we agree that there is a major gap in Europe since the Blair House agreement limited leguminous production and the CAP reform of 2003 discontinued the protein crop scheme. The recent hearing in the European Parliament’s Agriculture and Rural Development committee vividly illustrated this⁷, with agreement of all MEPs present that the CAP needs a scheme for home-grown plant proteins. A plant protein plan was indeed promised by the Commission at the end of the CAP reform negotiations, taking inspiration from the successful French scheme which boosted production of leguminous crops. Growing more leguminous crops in rotation is a win-win-win situation for farmers, society and the environment, as it also stimulates rural economies thanks to localised feed production, and input autonomy from the imported soya which drives destruction of tropical forests and savannahs in South America. Less dependence on imported soya would also relieve farmers squeezed by production costs.

Looking forward, we urge you to take the time to develop an ambitious EU plant protein scheme, which would include leguminous crops as part of crop rotations.

Resilient and robust agro-ecosystems are essential to withstand climate change and other environmental impacts, with benefits to be seen not only on the farms in question but across whole landscapes, with improvements to entire rural communities and indeed the whole of society.

Yours sincerely,

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⁵ Article 4.7.4, Opinion by the European Economic and Social Committee of 21 September 2016 on the biodiversity policy of the EU, <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.nat-opinions.38740>

⁶ <http://www.arc2020.eu/2014/01/pressure-builds-to-save-ecological-focus-areas-from-pesticides/>

⁷ EP Committee of Hearing on "Improving European Plant Protein Supplies" 21 June 2016, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/agri/events-hearings.html?id=20160621CHE00151>

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