

A New Chance to Redress and Protect an Ambitious Pesticide Use Regulation

Contrary to the will of citizens and the need to protect bees, European lawmakers are slowly disarming the flagship legislation aiming to reduce pesticides. Negotiations and votes in the European Parliament have gradually removed ambitious elements in the new Sustainable Use Regulation (SUR). The result: a SUR that disrespects the EU's commitments and the call of European citizens to dramatically reduce pesticide use. But it is still time to salvage critical elements for a safer environment. The Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) at the European Parliament will vote on October 24. Citizens are watching, expecting them to redress the path of the SUR and the future of a sustainable Europe.

(Are you a concerned citizen? [Use the Save Bees and Farmers tool](#) to ask your ministers and MEPs to work for an ambitious pesticide regulation!)

Reducing pesticide use in Europe is essential to secure a safer environment and protect the valuable role bees and wild pollinators play in our food security. We must remember that bees serve as ideal monitors of environmental conditions. If bees are not doing well because of unsustainable pesticide use, this means that there are troubling environmental issues beyond bee health. Hence, **an ambitious SUR is vital to improving bee health and general environmental quality.**

The path of the SUR bill has been, for the most part, disastrous for the interests of citizens and the pursuit of protecting bees, making it highly troubling. Over 1 million Europeans have already joined in demanding phasing out the use of pesticides to phase out synthetic pesticides, protecting bees and supporting farmers in the green transition (1). Additionally, a recent survey has shown that citizens in several European countries are highly concerned about the negative impact of pesticides on the environment and their health (2). Disappointingly unambitious legislation makes us wonder: whose interests are MEPs defending? Those of their constituents or the private interests of pesticide lobbies? These questions are pertinent in light of recent investigations revealing the substantial nexus between key MEPs and the agri and pesticide industry (3).

By scrapping vital elements in the SUR bill, MEPs have already missed significant opportunities. If this trend continues, the SUR will only maintain the status quo of environmental pollution and toxicity caused by pesticide use. Essential elements, such as compulsory requirements for Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and legally binding European and national pesticide use reduction targets, have been removed. Meanwhile, other indispensable protection elements are under pressure. Lawmakers are seeking to ensure what can only be deemed illusory buffer zones of barely 3 to 5 meters. These choices are unscientific and downright harmful, especially as recent studies repeatedly confirm that living surrounded by pesticide-intensive fields such as vineyards increases your "chance" as a child to get cancer (4).

BeeLife's Scientific Director reacted to the dire situation: "I have worked constructively with EU institutions for over ten years to improve citizens and environmental health. For the first time, I feel depressed and angry as I lost trust in politicians. Controversial topics, like pesticide authorisation and use or the agricultural model evolution, do not have consensus because they depend on beliefs and experiences and involve great monetary interests and control over strategic sectors like food, fibre or energy. That is why field data and science are important, and we have a science-based policy approach. Today, various national ministries and right-wing deputies do not want to acknowledge science and field data is obviated. Organisations with economic interests heavily lobby decision-makers. Afterwards, reaching them with the facts and figures (including field data) or proposing virtuous alternatives seem useless. Instead, fake rhetoric keeps ruling. In the data era, I cannot understand how decision-making may go in the wrong direction."

BeeLife
European Beekkeeping Coordination



DRONES WITHIN THE SUR

What you may have heard...	What it is in fact...
Not a real aerial spraying – no need of derogation	 Aerial spraying – Ban should stay the rule
Small and precise	 Bigger than expected, not so precise and sometimes high risk of drift...
Less pesticides	 Depending on the material and the crop may required added terrestrial spraying sessions to be effective
Easy to use	 Creating more dependence for the farmers as you need a special licence
"Swarm spraying" like a game – photo montage	Small helicopter used for spraying




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Furthermore, the presently proposed indicator to measure pesticide reduction appears profoundly ill-suited for its intended function and could potentially lead to misleading outcomes. In addition to a flawed indicator, AGRI MEPs recently voted against legal provisions for public funds to support farmers transitioning to pesticide-free agricultural practices.

In the following vote on October 24, we urge ENVI MEPs to consider the measures they can still salvage for a SUR that seeks to defend public interests. One of them concerns aerial spraying of pesticides. **Although aerial spraying is currently promoted as a revolution in precision farming, there is little evidence to back these claims.** We need safe innovations with appropriate risk assessments. Additionally, there is no evidence that aerial spraying effectively helps in pesticide use reduction. In some cases, this practice has even proven to lead to more significant toxicity risks due to higher concentration dosages in the fields (5). As it currently stands, the SUR would allow for a too permissible framework for aerial spraying, allowing for its widespread practice in our fields and forests.

MEPs are carrying a vast responsibility, and they should heed the call of their constituents. We need a strong SUR in Europe that provides the legislative foundations to reduce pesticide use and achieve the EU Green Deal's sustainability goals. On October 24 and in the following steps (plenary vote expected in November and subsequent trilogues between European Parliament, Commission, and Council), MEPs are once more responsible for ensuring that citizens and bees enjoy a safe and healthy environment that allows them to thrive.

(1) www.savebeesandfarmers.eu

(2) Pesticides Action Network, 2023, *Pesticides: Play it Safe! Opinion Poll Shows Europeans are Opposed to Gambling with Pesticides*, https://www.pan-europe.info/sites/pan-europe.info/files/public/resources/reports/IPSOS%20Poll_Play%20it%20safe%21.pdf

(3) Carlile, C., 2023, *Revealed: Meetings Blitz Between Big Ag and Anti-Green Lawmakers in Europe*, https://www.desmog.com/2023/10/04/revealed-meetings-blitz-between-big-ag-and-anti-green-lawmakers-in-europe/?_thumbnail_id=61639

(4) INSERM, 2023, *Une étude de l'Inserm s'intéresse au lien entre le risque de leucémie pédiatrique et le fait d'habiter à proximité de vignes*, <https://presse.inserm.fr/une-etude-de-linserm-sinteresse-au-lien-entre-le-risque-de-leucemie-pediatrique-et-le-fait-dhabiter-a-proximite-de-vignes/67576/>

(5) Taira, Kumiko, et al., 2006, *Long QT and ST-T change associated with organophosphate exposure by aerial spray*, *Environmental Toxicology and Pharmacology* 22 40–45