

# Discussion on the future of plant protection in the EU – part of the broader discussion on the future of food production and the prevention of climate change

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Over the last decade, humanity has acutely felt the threat of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution of the planet. A report by IPBES establishes that nature is declining at an unprecedented rate in human history, with the rate of species extinction accelerating. According to WWF, the world has lost almost 70% of its wild animal species since 1970. This threatens the ecosystems on which food and agriculture depend. At the same time, the latest warnings from the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) clearly show that this decade

we have a last chance to limit global warming to 1.5oC, after which we will embark on an irreversible course that will render some parts of this planet uninhabitable and others increasingly inhospitable.

Agriculture, as the largest industry in the world, contributes to the problems and is expected to offer solutions. The sector employs more than one billion people and produces food worth over 1.3 trillion dollars annually. Pastures and crops occupy about 50 percent of habitable land and provide habitat and food for numerous species. The world's population today exceeds 7 billion, and by 2100 it is expected to reach 11 billion. Further expansion of land for agriculture is unacceptable, because it is the most important factor in the loss of biological diversity, the increase of greenhouse gases and the negative impact on the environment. The drive to increase productivity to meet the needs of a growing population creates severe pressure in view of the environmental consequences. Diseases, pests and weeds affect crop production, leading to loss of resources (water, energy, labour) and negatively impacting sustainability.

Thanks to the increased media interest around the International Year of Plant Health (2020), it has become widely known that healthy plants are the foundation of all life, the functioning of ecosystems and food security. Pests and diseases damage crops, reducing the availability of food and increasing the costs of its production. Maintaining plant health protects the environment, forests and biological diversity from plant pests, addresses the consequences of climate change and supports efforts to end hunger, malnutrition and poverty. Today, up to 40% of food crops are lost annually due to pests. In terms of economic value, plant diseases alone cost the global economy about 220 billion dollars annually and invasive insects about 70 billion dollars. By protecting plants from pests, diseases and weeds and preventing their spread to new areas, plant health directly contributes to the conservation of our biological diversity and the protection of the environment. In addition, better plant health in agriculture reduces the need to use chemicals for pest control. This, in turn, also contributes to environmental protection.

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In 2020, the EU launched the European Green Deal, the “Farm to Fork” strategy and the Biodiversity Strategy. They contain plans to significantly reduce Europe’s contribution to climate change, to transform agriculture towards sustainable levels of production and consumption, and to protect the environment and biodiversity. The discussion on the future of plant protection in the EU is part of a much broader discussion on the future of food production and the prevention of climate change. In 2020, crop protection can no longer be carried out in isolation. Plant protection is embedded in an integrated production strategy that encompasses all inputs and

measures necessary to optimise the crop production process. Public pressure and the needs of farmers necessitate the search for change. Innovations in industry, together with fundamental and applied research from universities and research institutes, create opportunities to improve crop protection techniques. The policy to reduce the use of plant protection products requires the accelerated development of alternatives. The food and agricultural system possesses human know-how and inventiveness, innovations and technologies, and natural capital to increase its productivity and resilience, as well as to reduce its own carbon footprint and remove billions of tonnes of carbon from the atmosphere and lock it into soils, forests, peatlands and wetlands.

**The challenge is to build a more sustainable food and agricultural system that mitigates the effects of climate change and restores biodiversity and our ecosystems.**

This can be achieved through: the development and large-scale implementation of regenerative agriculture and similar approaches leading to improved outcomes for productive and environmentally sustainable farming; valuing and accounting for the use of natural capital such as water, soil, air and biodiversity by the agri-food system; market incentives and public financing for the restoration of nature and the provision of various ecosystem services; sharing knowledge and pursuing innovations in technologies and practices that support both food and environmental security and moving away from those that do not.



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