

'The health status of sunflower and corn – an indicator of the level of agronomic competence'

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The challenges facing agricultural production are significant. The extreme dynamics of abiotic factors, part of global climate change, place the agricultural sector in a unique situation. Its mission is non-alternative: **GROWTH IN AN UNCERTAIN ENVIRONMENT!** Achieving such a relevant, high, and fateful goal for humanity initiates the need for a transformation of its vision. This can be realized with a multifunctional, predictable, adequate, and sustainable production model – a result of launching a new behavioral format, including mechanisms for tracking biological processes, risk management, diversification of practices, further intensification of plant protection, selection, and nutrition. In other words: key agronomic competencies will be the foundation of successful agriculture. This year's

agricultural campaign in Bulgaria regarding plant protection is very likely to proceed under the sign of unexpectedly occurring events, phenomena, and processes. And if this definition is very strong and with a dramatic undertone, it can be said with a high degree of certainty that plant protection – its quality, intensity, innovativeness, and efficiency – will be the decisive condition for achieving the planned goals in the production of agricultural crops.

Analysts on the topic draw attention to several characteristics that shape the profile of this year's situation regarding the deteriorating phytosanitary situation and the escalation of harmful potential, including in the sunflower and maize segment, the subject of the editorial theme in this issue of the magazine.

The exceptionally atypical climatic conditions during the typical winter months – November, December, and January – give domestic experts in the fields of herbology, phytopathology, and entomology grounds to reaffirm that, according to their forecasts as well, the phytosanitary environment will be significantly different from the standard one. This new situation initiates creativity and additional motivation for defining adequate solutions, changing perspectives, positioning individual components, a fast track for practices that allow intervention at an earlier stage, actions related to prevention, which do not exclude even over-insurance.

The first thing every agricultural producer must do is to assess with maximum possible accuracy the likelihood of these forecasts occurring on their own farm, recognize the dangers, and foresee whether they will find themselves in the "eye of the storm," analyze the deficits, and formulate a sufficiently effective buffer system and maximum flexibility of the schemes. The atypical environment is a professional provocation for agronomic capacity and preparation, testing the management toolkit of agromanagers. In this very special and explosive phytosanitary situation, it should be noted that companies from the global agrochemical industry, which are actively present on the Bulgarian pesticide market, presented their product portfolios for 2014 to a wide audience – the leading agricultural producers in the country.

It is noticeable that the multinational companies are emitting very strong and positive signals – available product resources, smart working solutions, and technological peak achievements for dealing with force majeure circumstances – radicalization of the infectious background, increased pressure from weeds and pests, emergence of centrifugal forces in the phytosanitary environment, ways to overcome stressful situations due to manifestations of various depressive factors... In other words: the agrochemical industry is ready to provide sufficiently creative and effective means, technological solutions, and conceptual projects for rational actions in a complicated, difficult, and highly provocative environment. It demonstrates a corporate commitment to support farmers to succeed regardless of the disturbing circumstances.

Since Bulgarian agriculture became part of the unified European agro-space and embarked on the path of transformation and modernization, the strong brands from the agrochemical industry have defined very powerful information platforms and innovation transfer systems. For every large

company, ordinary advertising is not enough to get its message to every farmer. It must be part of an event that attracts broad interest. The world leaders are investing in Bulgarian agriculture, investing in the construction of its new and profitable model. They are part of this event!

And regardless of all these correct and real conclusions relating to the fact that multinational companies offer innovative, high-quality, and original plant protection, as well as sufficiently committed and reliable solutions to deal with this year's extremely atypical phytosanitary situation, how could this audience – about 5000 Bulgarian agromanagers, who cultivate about 80% of the land – make their informed choice? And for this choice not to be on a random principle, but the only correct one?

The question is logical – is the Bulgarian agricultural producer ready to make their informed, rational choice of the precise plant protection products, the precise working project, the precise functional format? The correct choice, as is well known, means being technologically significant, formulating one's own, authentic strategy against any challenges, surprises, and turbulences, creates the feeling that someone else is also involved in your cause – to win and move forward, regardless of natural inconveniences and unregulated manifestations of harmful potential.

The Bulgarian agricultural producer should by no means become a hostage, turn into a hypnotized target. But is he able to orient himself, can he make the right decision? It is true, every farmer has the right to choose and can exercise their competencies if they possess sufficient expert qualities and professional knowledge. Because we must agree with the statements that plant protection is not a panacea, but it is a powerful means, a tool for achieving a high health status of agricultural crops, it is capable of launching production into another orbit, contributing to the fulfillment of plans for stable, sustainable agriculture.

We are about to witness a particularly interesting agricultural season, in which plant protection has been assigned a very special role. Sunflower and maize are strategic crops in Bulgarian agriculture, and their effective protection in a complex phytosanitary situation and any climatic surprises will have a limiting significance for future yields and future profits!