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## PRESS RELEASE

### **The EU Bill for Pesticide Reduction Target is under threat, and so too the liveable future of this planet**

**BRUSSELS, BELGIUM 14 Dec 2022** - The EU has recognised the growing problem of pesticides, but has achieved little in 20 years even though public and scientific concern has grown. Legally binding major reductions are finally on the table, but the agricultural ministers are set to effectively veto these in the very near future. NGOs have demonstrated (through leaked documents) that the Czech presidency to the EU is breaking the neutrality rules. Meanwhile, 10 member states, namely Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, are looking to delay at least or derail at best the bill<sup>1</sup>.

In December 2019, the European Commission presented the [European Green Deal](#) to address accelerating biodiversity loss ([IPBES 2019](#)) that is "*putting the future of our food, livelihoods, health and environment under severe threat*" ([FAO 2019](#)), and is interlinked with the climate crisis ([IPCC 2019](#)). The EU Green Deal is the first holistic approach Europe has taken to address the major environmental challenges that lie ahead of us. It has been hailed as a project of hope by the scientific community and civil society.

The biodiversity crisis is addressed in the EU's Green Deal, including the Farm to Fork (F2F) and the [Biodiversity strategies](#). These contain a bundle of measures targeted to decrease greenhouse gases, agricultural nitrogen emissions, pesticides and antibiotics use, *etc.* The strategies also aim to protect pollinators, restore biodiversity-enhancing features on agricultural land and in protected areas, and expand organic farming to 25% of all cultivated land by 2030. Considering the field reality, pesticide reduction is the only way to bring a little health into our environment and allow biodiversity to ensure our food security, enabling pollination and pest control of our crops<sup>2</sup>.

These goals are still to be ensured through concrete legislation. Regarding pesticide reduction targets, which provide in particular for "*50% reduction in the use and risk of plant protection products by 2030*" and "*the use of more hazardous plant protection products*", on 22 June 2022, the EU Commission presented the draft regulation on the sustainable use of plant protection products ([SUR](#)). This provides legally binding pesticide reduction targets for all member states, compatible with the EU-wide reduction target of 50% by 2030, and also a ban on all pesticide use in "sensitive areas". Ensuring all farmers practise [Integrated Pest Management](#) in which chemical pesticides are used only as a last resort. Helping farmers access required advice and guidance for more sustainable farming and

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<sup>1</sup> <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-12601-2022-INIT/x/pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Garibaldi et al., 2019. Policies for ecological intensification of crop production  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tree.2019.01.003>

even more ambitious synthetic pesticide reduction by 80% by 2030, with a phase out of synthetic pesticides by 2035<sup>3</sup>.

As early as 1993, the EU recognised the need to reduce the use of chemicals in agriculture in its [Fifth Environmental Action Programme](#) and defined as a target, among other things, the "significant reduction of pesticide use per unit of cultivated area" by the year 2000. At the [Council of Agriculture Ministers in Cardiff](#) in 1998, the member states reaffirmed their determination to reduce the environmental risks of pesticide use, such as the impairment of biodiversity and the pollution of waters. More than 20 years later, the Commission presented its Farm to Fork and Biodiversity Strategies, both of which propose a 50% pesticide reduction as a key measure. Two years later, the Commission proposed the SUR to replace the SUD, one letter changed in order to make these targets legally binding.

There has been a catalogue of missed opportunities, promises and failed targets, despite the scientifically undisputed urgency of taking action to halt the ongoing loss of biodiversity, resistance to legally binding quantitative targets for pesticide reduction is very strong in some Member States. Having said that, in nearly 20 years of EU legal programmes and recommendations without binding targets have brought little progress so far.

Noa Simon, Scientific director of BeeLife, said: *"The consequences of the failure of this bill and the attitude of business as usual will have disastrous effects on all our future health, food, and environment. Bees, insects and those who live from them, like beekeepers, cannot continue suffering the consequences. We are at a crucial crossroads, and the decisions made will have long-term ramifications."*

The SUR reform and its ability to begin pesticides reductions through the EU is now in the hands of the Member States. It is the moment for them to show they listen to the citizens, who are asking to restore biodiversity and protect human health. They want to see the use of synthetic pesticides strongly reduced by 2030. The SUR has to follow its legislative process, we do not need another impact assessment, we do not need any further delay.

The SUR must go on!

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<sup>3</sup> 1.2 million Europeans signed the [European Citizen Initiative "Save bees and Farmers"](#)