

Extrait de IPMnet News N° 168 Janvier/Février 2009

EU Stirs Up the Pesticide Approval Stew

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The simmering pesticide regulation pot has reached a rolling boil with the 13 January 2009 votes in the European Parliament to significantly tighten registration and future use and presence of certain pesticides in the EU community, a move seen to have widespread impact within the EU and beyond, according to numerous sources.

A Europa/RAPID news release reports that the agreed upon regulation replaces an existing framework, and covers authorization, use, and control of “plant protection products” [no doubt meaning ‘crop’ protection products as it’s doubtful farmers will apply products to enhance weed growth. Ed.]. The products cited fall into the groups of the various synthetically produced “chemical” ‘cides’ that contain “active substances.”

To be approved in the future, each active substance will have to be proven safe in terms of health, including residues in the food chain, animal health, and the environment. EU member states will be constrained to authorize only those products containing approved active material. Non-chemical biological control agents, including some highly virulent materials and potentially toxic naturally occurring products utilized in organic farming, apparently do not fall within the EU’s plan.

The regulations receiving a thumbs up from the EU Parliament next go before the Council of Ministers where adoption is said to be a formality, and then enter a process for determining actual implementation which is expected to be much more contentious and drawn-out exercise. It is at this step that the battle between “hazard-based” and “risk-based” approaches is anticipated to erupt in full fury.

The aspect of applying and enforcing EU pesticide restrictions to crops grown outside, and imported to, the EU is far from clear as some of the pesticides likely to be excluded from the EU’s approval list leave no detectable residues in the produce.

In the realm of further possibly unforeseen consequences, 160 scientists and malaria experts from around the world have signed a petition urging the EU to re-think the legislation which is likely to ban agricultural products from which effective malaria control insecticides are derived, essentially ending production of the latter. A noted specialist on vector-borne diseases commented that “the health of millions who suffer--and die--from malaria and other insect-borne diseases in less developed countries will be seriously compromised if invaluable insecticides are banned from the market.”

Other observers are less pessimistic believing that when more of the ramifications and outcomes are scientifically assessed, the results will be less restrictive and damaging than currently anticipated in some quarters. Some staunchly protected products may have their day in court, if statements from agricultural elements hold true. Clearly, the last volley has yet to be fired before policies are fully cooked into iron-clad regulations.

--information excerpted, with thanks, from a variety of sources. [#]