

13 October 2022 EP Seminar – Transcript speech Tilly Metz MEP

Our focus today is on the authorisation procedure for biocontrol alternatives to pesticides.

The current regulatory framework for plant protection products does not legally differentiate between biological and synthetic chemical plant protection products.

This means biological and microbial plant protection products have to have to jump through the same hoops as chemical pesticides.

But from a scientific perspective, this does not make sense!

They are completely different products, with a completely different origin, mode of operation and impact.

And this is something that the European Parliament has repeatedly acknowledged.

Since 2009, Regulation 11/07 already foresees the possibility to fast-track authorisation procedures for biocontrol alternatives.

But in 13 years, nothing has happened!

Instead, there are massive delays in authorisation, caused by both misapplication or lack of implementation of the law and by what is ultimately a political decision not to award appropriate financial and human resources.

=> EFSA and Member States authorities do not have enough capacity and expertise to deal with these requests; it takes up to 10 years (!!)
for biocontrol alternatives to reach farmers.

In parallel, there are plenty of potentially highly toxic chemical pesticides on the EU market; Such products are authorised,

or their approval prolonged despite concerning data gaps regarding their safety for humans, animals and the environment.

I am grateful to EFSA for taking these data gaps seriously and requesting that the industry deliver the necessary information, like in the case of glyphosate. It is high time!

We need to take a good hard look at the current authorisation procedures of plant protection products and in general, all decision which could impact citizens' health. All decisions need to be science- and fact-based as well as entirely transparent for EU citizens.

Specifically on low-risk pesticides of biological origin the European Parliament, representing the citizens of the EU has already asked several times for the creation of a high-quality fast-track evaluation, authorisation and registration process.

SUSTAINABLE USE OF PESTICIDES REGULATION

The Sustainable use of pesticides regulation presents a **big opportunity to push for the use of biocontrol** as an alternative to chemical pesticides. But for farmers to be able to use these alternatives, they need to be authorised and available on the market as soon as possible.

This needs to be considered within the SUR and its implementing acts.

Within the new regulation, we also need to **demand a dedicated budget for training of farmers on biocontrol**. Farmers need to be familiarized as early as possible

with the use and benefits of biocontrol.
+ If the demand goes up,
pressure on the authorisation processes
will also be increased!

But beyond farmers,
We also need to train the trainers!
And advisory services.
Here I am thinking
of the Common Agricultural Policy,
and funding which could be reserved
for this cause.

Now, from the European Parliament's perspective,

**What are the options on the table
to speed up the authorisation process for biocontrol?**

1. One option would be to **revise Regulation 11/07**
on the authorisation of plant production products,
to set biological and microbial products
in a category of their own for good.
But to be honest,
we have enough open files at the moment,
and we could lose more than we win.

2. Another option would be a specific **implementing act or guidelines** on a fast-track
procedure
We know that the European Commission, Member States and EFSA
are currently discussing a new Guideline document,
which could move things award.
These guidelines should be elaborated as soon as possible.

A very important aspect for us greens,
the elaboration should take place
in an inclusive and transparent way.
Relevant Stakeholders—
including particularly consumers
and biological/microbial industries
should be able to contribute
with their experience and expertise.

3. And of course one action
that the European Parliament should repeat in any case,
and that I would like to insist on today:
is to ask for **more budget and experts**

on assessment of low-risk biological plant protection products, for EFSA and national authorisation authorities.

4. Finally, looking at the long to medium term, the European Commission might consider proposing a dedicated legislative framework for biocontrol. As I said, it is difficult to bundle authorisation processes for fundamentally different categories of products. It goes without saying that such a framework, if it is ever proposed, should uphold a high level safety.

My intervention today wouldn't be complete if I didn't invite you to

look at the bigger picture:

There is a need for a system change!

The focus needs to be on prevention of pests, on maintaining a high and healthy level of biodiversity.

Pest populations love monocultures. And by definition, they multiply fast and can evolve quickly around active ingredients that they are exposed to on a regular basis.

So you can't just rely on pesticides to manage pests. Even for more sustainable options, like biological pesticides, it shouldn't be the first and only tool farmers use.

I know that you are all familiar with the notion of Integrated pest management, and yes, I know that the concept has been so poorly implemented these past years that the letters IPM have become almost meaningless. But let's change that!

Because the principles of IPM are still valid!

If we can use alternative means of pest control, and significantly reduce the use of synthetic pesticides, we can move away from regular applications that cover whole fields or landscapes.

This will be vital for the fight against pest resistance, the loss of biodiversity

and the pollution of our waters and our soils.

Chemical pesticides should be the very last resort,
not the go-to, routine tool
in the farmers' toolbox.

One of our green advisors likes to use
the "many little hammers" versus 'wrecking balls' metaphor:
instead of killing off everything within reach,
biocontrol can ADD to biodiversity,
using nature's wisdom
to restore the equilibrium of the ecosystem
and thereby regulating pests naturally.

As functional biodiversity
is our major weapon against pests,
and has many co-benefits,
including for productivity,
we need to protect it.

It is a different way of doing agriculture,
a holistic, agro-ecological approach.

And yes, unfortunately
there are some colleagues in the European Parliament
who will defend chemical pesticides tooth and nail.
BUT a majority of the Members have and will agree
that we need to move away from them,
and that biological and microbial alternatives
are one of the central elements
which will allow the EU to do so.

If and only if we support
their development, deployment
and speed up the authorisation process.