

ARE YOU PROTECTED FROM HARMFUL PESTICIDES?

An explainer

Background

In October 2017 the European Parliament approved a resolution calling for a full ban on the harmful pesticide glyphosate by the end of 2022. This fell short of demands from the Left for an immediate ban because of scientific evidence that glyphosate is “probably carcinogenic to humans.”

Over one million EU citizens from 22 member states supported a European Citizens’ Initiative (ECI) to ban glyphosate, to reform the pesticide approval procedure, and to set EU-wide mandatory reduction targets for pesticide use.

Disregarding the Parliament’s resolution and public opinion, member states approved a 5-year extension for the glyphosate authorisation, after seven previous failed attempts. But the member states’ decision wasn’t unanimous, with nine countries voting against and France, among other countries, pledging to ban glyphosate in the near future.

The controversy led the European Parliament to set up a Special Committee on the EU’s authorisation procedure for pesticides (the so-called PEST committee). The Committee was tasked with assessing the authorisation procedure for pesticides in the EU, potential failures in how substances are scientifically evaluated and approved, the role of the European Commission in renewing the glyphosate licence, and possible conflicts of interest in the approval procedure.

After months of deliberation and hearing of evidence from stakeholders, the Committee has completed its report and recommendations, which will be endorsed by the Parliament this month.

LESS PESTICIDES, SAFER FOOD

There are more than

1000
pesticides
in use around the world

In Germany,

3/4

of urine samples

tested positive
for Glyphosate

In Europe, more than

60%

of hair samples
contain traces of at least one pesticide



Did you know?

The World Health Organization and the UN Environment Programme estimate that each year, 3 million workers in agriculture in the developing world experience severe poisoning from pesticides, about 18,000 of whom die.

Glyphosate approval: a systemic failure

The approval process of glyphosate is symptomatic of the wider state of the pesticide approval process in the EU. The so-called Monsanto Papers, released as part of a US lawsuit, exposed how the company ghostwrote studies of supposedly independent scientists, avoided pursuing studies which might show unwelcome results, and did not adequately test its products for toxicity. The company also resorted to bullying tactics to discredit independent research that questioned the safety of glyphosate.

Responsible EU agencies like the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) have relied heavily on these dubious studies to reach their conclusions and recommendations in favour of glyphosate approval. The glyphosate renewal process highlighted serious shortcomings in the pesticide approval process. It showed that EU is prioritising the interests of the pesticide industry over the health of citizens in its decision-making.

The fight against glyphosate is therefore a fight for democracy in the EU, for our health, and against the undue influence of corporate lobbies.

The view of the Left

The PEST committee investigated the current pesticide approval process and recommended concrete measures to make it more robust such as dismissing the adverse effects of pesticides only with full justification and stronger risk management measures.

The report asks for public access to all studies in their entirety, for funding to be made available for independent research and for research into alternatives to pesticides, including non-chemical methods.

A recommendation highly advocated and welcomed by our shadow MEP Anja Hazekamp is the call for application of non-animal tests and technologies in the testing of active substances.

Furthermore, the PEST committee calls for a Scientific Advice Mechanism to initiate a systematic review of all available studies concerning the carcinogenicity of glyphosate to assess whether it would be justified to review the approval.

GUE/NGL MEPs played a leading role in guaranteeing these and other recommendations.

What our MEPs say?

Anja Hazekamp (Partij voor de Dieren, Netherlands) "Each year, about 400.000 tonnes of pesticides are sold and used in the EU. Such an extreme amount is utterly horrendous. As is the fact that many of these pesticides have not been evaluated thoroughly for their safety. The current overuse of pesticides is a threat to our food safety, to our health, to the health of animals, and to the environment. The recommendations of the PEST committee - to increase the independence and transparency of EU's pesticide approvals - are therefore an important step towards achieving a cleaner environment for us and for future generations."



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