



Analysis: Post-truth rhetoric on EU pesticide reduction to protect agro-industrial status quo

European Citizens' Initiative calls for constructive negotiations

16 March 2023 - For over one year one of the essential parts of the European Commission's Farm2Fork proposals - the "[Sustainable Use of Pesticides Regulation \(SUR\)](#)" - and its pesticide reduction target of 50% less use by 2030 is under an intensified and fierce attack by parts of the Council and the European Parliament. New analysis published today shows that the opponents use misleading, incorrect and scientifically unsubstantiated claims preventing a factual solution-oriented political discourse. This serves the interests of the pesticide industry, not the needs of society. It is detrimental to health and biodiversity and jeopardises food production.

With regard to today's European Parliament's plenary debate (16/3) on the successful European Citizen Initiative (ECI) 'Save Bees and Farmers'¹ the coordinating NGOs publish a [fact check](#)² on several recent political claims concerning the SUR, which the European Commission wants to make legally binding for all member states.

The discussion of the EP rapporteur MEP Sarah Wiener's report in the European Parliament's ENVI Committee on March 2, served as the basis for the fact check. The 'arguments' in the transcripts of the speeches of nine MEPs (six EPP, two ECR and one ID representative) who spoke negatively on the Wiener-report or the SUR-targets, in general, were systematically analysed.

The top-5 of the most frequently cited and now debunked arguments against pesticide reduction of the SUR are:

1. The (presumed) threat to food security (14 mentions);
2. Doubts about the ecological benefits (9 mentions);
3. Rejection of measures in sensitive areas (8 mentions);
4. Warnings about higher food prices (6 mentions)
5. Dependence on food imports (5 mentions).

The Fact check shows that where these political claims were done without supporting facts, they can mostly be dismissed as not backed or outright contradicted by facts or scientific research³. Even in those cases where MEPs do cite 'supporting evidence' this is mostly done in a selective and deceiving manner, by not quoting studies correctly.

ECI spokesperson Helmut Burtscher-Schaden (GLOBAL 2000): *"By using tactics of 'post-truth politics' some centre-right politicians and conservatives have led the crucial political debate about protecting biodiversity and future food security to a new low point. Given that in December 2022 the*

¹ More about the ECI Save Bees and Farmers: <https://www.bee-life.eu/post/1-million-eu-citizens-tell-eu-commission-end-the-war-against-nature>. The Save Bees and Farmers initiative demands are: 1. A phase-out of the use of synthetic pesticides: By 2030 the use of synthetic pesticides shall be gradually reduced by 80% in EU agriculture. By 2035, agriculture in the entire Union shall be working without synthetic pesticides. 2. Measures to recover biodiversity: Habitats shall be restored and agricultural areas shall become a vector of biodiversity recovery. 3. Support for farmers: Farmers must be supported in the necessary transition towards agroecology. Small, diverse and sustainable farms shall be favoured, organic farming expanded, and research into pesticide-free and GMO-free agriculture will be supported.

² For this [Fact check](#) in total, arguments against the SUR were raised 56 times in the nine analysed speeches of Conservative MEPs. In many cases these arguments were redundant and therefore were clustered for this analysis. In those (predominant) cases in which the arguments were put forward without supporting them with concrete facts, we carried out a general evaluation of the arguments. In those cases in which an argument was supported by concrete figures, studies or other sources, these were subjected to a fact check.

³ There is little evidence to support the narrative that reducing pesticides and greening agriculture threatens food security. On the other hand, there is a broad scientific consensus that given the environmental emissions of nitrogen, greenhouse gases and pesticides, sticking to the current input-intensive agricultural system would contribute significantly to exceeding planetary boundaries: <https://pubs.acs.org/doi/10.1021/acs.est.1c04158>



international community recognized during COPP15 in Montreal the gravity of biodiversity collapse, partly linked to synthetic pesticide use, this is irresponsible and dangerous.”

The organisers of the ECI point out that the vast majority of Europeans are in favour of significantly reducing pesticide use.

The people deserve that politicians make their decisions responsibly and in recognition of scientific facts. Martin Dermine, main representative of the citizen’s committee says: *“In this sense, we appeal to all politicians in the European Parliament to enter into constructive negotiations in the interest of the environment, health and sustainable agriculture.”*

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