



Brussels, 11 November 2014

In today and tomorrow's agricultural council, the Austrian and the Hungarian delegations will suggest to allow more pesticides in EU's maize sector under the excuse of needing to eradicate a well-established pest. A year ago, EU agreed with Member States that it was no longer possible to eradicate this pest. Member States should instead learn to live with it. Furthermore, chemicals used to eradicate it from conventional maize cropping systems are highly toxic to bees and some are therefore banned.

European maize cultivation covers around 14 million hectares in the EU. This crop is mainly used for animal feed. On average, around 22% of maize cultivation in the EU is by continuous monoculture. Maize is one of the most intensively grown crops. It is widely linked to a variety of environmental problems ranging from biodiversity loss and soil erosion to overconsumption and pollution of water, linked to heavy pesticides use.

In 2002 the maize pest *Diabrotica virgifera virgifera*, the western corn rootworm - also known as the billion dollar pest - started to spread in the European Union. In 2003 the European Commission included *Diabrotica* as a regulated harmful organism with quarantine status and introduced emergency measures. Preventative measures, such as crop rotation, were mandatory, to avoid its spread¹.

Unfortunately many Member States did not take these emergency measures seriously, with the consequences that the pest spread. And in 2013, pressure from some Member States, farmers unions and maize growers associations, resulted in the repeal of this EU law, as it is considered 'no longer possible to control and eradicate the pest from the EU territory'².

¹ Following the spread of the diabrotica in 2002 into Italy, France and Austria, the EU introduced in 2003 it was agreed by Commission Decision 2003/766/EC to control the pest by using traps to monitor the spread and making it mandatory for farmers to apply crop rotation in demarked and safety zones. Also it was decided that Member States reported annually to the European Commission.

² Commission implementing Decision of 6 February 2014 repealing Decision 2003/766/EC on emergency measures to prevent the spread within the Community of *Diabrotica virgifera* Le Conte, says :*it is not feasible to block its further spread and effective and sustainable means of control minimising the impact of that organism on maize yield exist, in particular the implementation of a crop rotation scheme*

Surprisingly enough, measures against the western corn rootworm will be discussed again today or tomorrow in the European Council: *The Austrian and the Hungarian delegations will brief the Council about control measures to eradicate the corn rootworm, including intensification of the research on the parasite and on the other hand better harmonised procedures for the authorisation of suitable plant protection products in the member states affected.*

The permanent resurgence of this topic is useless: chemical ways of fighting *Diabrotica* are either banned (neonicotinoids) and highly toxic to bees and the environment (pyrethroids). Furthermore, a rotation of crops every 3 years is enough to limit damages under economical threshold.

The emergency measure introduced by the European Commission in 2003 called on crop rotation as the key to combat the pest in infected areas; but majority of MS – including especially Hungary – did never implement this. Instead, farmers according to the Member States reports, sprayed with heavy chemicals including neonicotinoids, pyrethroids (deltamethrin, cypermethrin) and organophosphate (chlorpyrifos). Now they are asking more of these products onto the market while it has been demonstrated that crop rotation is more economical and efficient than the use of pesticides. Is this not absurd?

PAN Europe's president, Francois Veillerette, calls for the European Commission to stand strong in this *reminding Members State that since January 2014, non-chemical alternatives to pesticides are mandatory for farmers. Furthermore, non-toxic biological control of Diabrotica based on entomoparasitic nematodes are available on the market when pressure in Diabrotica is too high.*

Francesco Panella, president of Bee Life and beekeeper who has suffered in first place the harm of neonicotinoid treated maize asks for alternatives to pesticides to be implemented for pest control: *“We have seen it in Italy. Since 2008 no maize seed is treated with neonicotinoids anymore and yields never dropped. Farmers rotated maize with other crops and used resistant varieties. The beekeepers in the maize areas have experienced a re-boost of their bees.”*

For more information:

Francesco Panella, Bee Life : +32 10 34 16, info@bee-life.eu

Martin Dermine, PAN Europe: +32 486 32 99 92, martin@pan-europe.info