

Position paper **Biocontrol**

Fruit, vegetables, arable crops, flowers, and plants grown with net-zero emissions nor residues on products. That is our ambition for 2030. Our growers are moving from cultivations based on conventional synthetic plant protection products (PPPs) towards greener ones. Future growing is based on resilient plants and pests and diseases being tackled utterly with natural enemies, biocontrol, precision techniques, and low-risk substances. Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and precision techniques have become the standard. Accelerating the access to biocontrol and low-risk substances on the EU market could help to further lowering our footprint through reinforcing IPM. To boost the resilience of EU horticulture, the Dutch Agricultural and Horticultural Organisation (LTO Nederland) and the Union of Dutch Greenhouse Growers (Glastuinbouw Nederland) champion the pending biopesticides law.

Fruit, vegetables, and arable crops are not just delicious but healthy too. Europe's growing and aging population does not just need more healthy nutrition in order to be fed, but also to foster its health and welfare. Meanwhile, flowers and plants green and cool our cities, restore biodiversity, mitigate climate change, and improve people's health and well-being. To meet this demand, our growers are working towards resilient systems in which pests and diseases are tackled as much as possible with natural enemies and biological products. The placing of effective biocontrol, low-risk active substances, and precision techniques on the internal market as well as allowing new breeding techniques (NBTs) would improve the resilience of our crops across the EU.

Accelerating access to biocontrol

Resilient plant production systems, in which crops flourish healthily, are an interaction of genetics, technology, biology, and chemistry with the aim of achieving the lowest possible footprint. With biology always being the first step in plant protection. This means that biocontrol such as predatory insects and PPPs of natural origin, like micro-organisms, are used first to tackle pests and diseases. Accessible and affordable alternatives form thus the basis in further greening our fruit, vegetable, arable, flower, and plant cultivations through IPM. Nevertheless, even in IPM, conventional PPPs remain needed to a limited extent to combat sudden outbreaks. For food sovereignty, waste, and competitiveness purposes, a chemical reset button should therefore always remain at hand.

While growers are rapidly losing active substances and have fewer resources to control pest and diseases, the availability of biocontrol in Europe lags behind compared to the rest of the world. This presents a fundamental competitiveness challenge to EU growers in achieving food sovereignty, restoring biodiversity, and improving the sustainability of our cultivations. This is because the authorisation of biocontrol is regulated through the same Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009 as chemical PPPs. A framework unfit to authorise biocontrol products, which are nature-based solutions, causing major delays in the availability for and application by growers. Adjustments are needed to establish a reliable climate for producers, seducing them to bringing biocontrol to the EU market first - also for minor crops. This will increase and accelerate opportunities for growers to pursue sustainability.

To accelerating access to biocontrol and low-risk products in Europe:

- A **simplification package** should in the short term targeted amend Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009 to immediately accelerating authorisations by addressing major bottlenecks. First, biocontrol should be defined, as envisaged in the preparatory documents of the Sustainable Use Regulation (SUR). A broad definition is desired to

cover future innovations as well, securing our growers' competitiveness. Secondly, a priority lane for biocontrol in the approval procedure of an active substance must be established. Thirdly, provisionally authorising biocontrol and low-risk products as previously accustomed under Art. 30, shelf renewal until deemed scientifically needed, and expanding labels grant that growers have fast, more biocontrol at their disposal.

- A **dedicated regulatory framework** should in the long run establish a fit-for-purpose authorisation procedure for biocontrol. Launching this regulation in the **Biotech Act** would shorten authorisation of new active substances for biocontrol and prevents long renewal procedures for existing biocontrol on the internal market. As is already the case for controlled environment agriculture (CEA), the current zoning system should be abandoned to create one zone for biocontrol in Europe, which would significantly lower the administrative burden as it requires only one assessment. Moreover, knowledge development should be stimulated and experimental space provided so that growers are practically supported in the application of biocontrol and low-risk.
- Improved **mutual recognition** of both biocontrol and chemical PPPs by Member States is vital to safeguard Europe's single market. Encouraging cooperation and information sharing among Member States would speed up mutual recognition. In preventing duplication, national authorities should be stimulated to automatically adopt the findings of the rapporteur Member State and to only request additional data for national demands instead of conducting a full new study.
- A **proactive policy** from the Commission to support the industry in the development of green alternatives for crops in which growers are expected to have too few alternatives at hand to remain productive or competitive. This should be drafted based on an **impact assessment** outlining the the specific pests and diseases per crop, the measures and substances available to combat them, and the substances that are projected to be lost in the coming years. Measures should consequently be taken to endorse the development and uptake of alternative measures and products for specific crops. EU projects, programmes like Horizon Europe, and investment in pilots or advisory services could advance IPM in these crops.

Reinforcing EFSA

To speed up risk assessment procedures, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) should be reinforced. A strong authority is key to provide timely, transparent, and independent scientific advice to accelerate the authorization process of biocontrol while conserving public health and the environment. To making agriculture and horticulture more sustainable, reinforcing EFSA is rightfully a priority in the Vision for Agriculture and Food.

To reinforcing EFSA:

- A **specific counter for sustainable active substances and biocontrol authorisation** should be established. Having a specific mandate within EFSA, dedicated team of experts carrying out these authorisations ensures a centralised, harmonised, and accelerated procedure for biocontrol in the internal market. The Sustainability Desk of the Dutch Board for the Authorisation of Plant Protection Products and Biocides (Ctgb) serves as a good example. National experts should be deployed to gain an increased scientific and practical understanding of biocontrol, biology, and ecology.
- **More policy supporting experts** should be recruited in addition to scientists. In the transition to greening our cultivations, specific tools and (biocontrol) PPPs are needed to further implement IPM. In order to realise these objectives, EFSA should better look at what is needed from a policy perspective and accordingly speed up the authorisation of these (biocontrol) PPPs required.