

POLLINIS
Conference on Integrated Pest Management
EP Intergroupe Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable
Development
Brussels July the 1st 2015

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you Chairman for giving me the opportunity to address this audience.

Thank you Professor Furlan for your intervention, which reminds us – if necessary still – that a paradigm shift in crop protection to realize sustainable practices in the production systems is neither just a theoretical option nor a renouncement of progress in agriculture.

POLLINIS is a European independent, non-political, non-profit organization that works towards achieving sustainable agriculture. We take action through awareness campaigns and petitions that in three years have attracted more than a million European followers.

Moreover, POLLINIS is also informing and sensitizing politicians, gathering the scientific community and civil society. We have met many MEPs across all political parties.

Let's not forget that Europeans are the primary consumers of agriculture products and their primary sponsors through their indirect contribution to the very expensive Common Agricultural Policy.

The reason why POLLINIS wished to participate in today's conference on Integrated Pest Management (IPM)—a very technical and sensitive topic—is to provide the point of view of those European citizens who support us en masse.

We want to briefly go back to the reasons why IPM was designed and the issues about crop protection it is meant to address. Because these issues still remain vital to all European citizens today. We would just like to remind you that Europe has become the world biggest pesticides consumer ahead of Asia and the USA.

As an NGO concerned with food security and the environment, POLLINIS has noted that, contrary to what is often said, IPM was not designed at first to address concerns about the environment or health issues.

When you take a look at the national action plans EU member states are

supposedly implementing to meet the 2009 Directive on the sustainable use of pesticides, we sometimes read that the primary goal of IPM is to reduce the use of pesticides by 30 or 40%.

This is not the case.

IPM principles and practices were designed decades ago by pest management experts to address one particularly alarming issue: Unavoidable and increasing pesticide resistance and what we call the toxic spiral of pesticides.

As you know, in every field and orchard a farmer creates an ecological niche for his crops. This niche also accommodates a myriad of competing organisms that will fight for the fruit of his labors. Pests—weeds, rodents, insects, fungi, bacteria—don't just reduce crop yields. They also increase production volatility and alter quality. Historically, they led to major agricultural crisis and even famines in Europe.

From this perspective, the introduction of synthetic insecticides and chemical control in the second half of the 20th century was seen as a major progress. Together with chemical fertilizers and plant breeding, chemical control contributed to greater agricultural outputs.

Chemical control led to high-yield agricultural systems and the rise of monocultures--homogeneous and vulnerable fields--practices which farmers would have never adopted if they didn't believe they would be able to keep all pests at bay forever.

They have become entirely dependent on a chemical umbrella and are left with no choice other than to treat their crops systematically and preventively, regardless of the presence or absence of pests.

Meanwhile, pests thrive. All of them have this essential capacity to adapt to the conditions of agricultural production. They evolve with surprising ease, adjusting to the toxic products that are supposed to kill them and has reduced the biodiversity that had regulatory effects on pest populations.

To outline this process, here is how the toxic spiral works:

At the beginning of the 20th century the first chemical pesticides were used on crops, but shortly after pests became resistant to it. This led to the need of increasing the toxicity level of pesticides every few years due to the persistent resistance pests started to develop. The use of DDT after the Second World War was prohibited in the sixties due to its disastrous effects on health and

environment. We are now using pesticides which toxicity level is far beyond those used at that time and still pests continue developing resistances to those highly toxic products leading us in this never ending toxic spiral.

By now, the collateral damage of this toxic spiral on the environment and on human health is well documented. But as we address this collateral damage with, for instance, much needed regulations, we tend to ignore the spiral itself, which is the *raison d'être* for implementing the IPM in the first place.

We are now faced with a more distressing sense of urgency. This toxic spiral has to come to an end, because if we continue to increase the use of systemic pesticides it will also continue to be detrimental for public health, the ecosystem and biodiversity as a consequence.

The cumulative knowledge of health and environmental risks leads to rules and regulations that limit the chemical arsenal and the scope of agrochemical research. In parallel, the cost of developing a new toxic substances has risen almost tenfold in the last 30 years.

Therefore, the agrochemical industry will not always be able to provide chemical solutions to the problems that were created.

Whatever definition we give IPM, we believe that its principles require addressing the toxic spiral and adopting a responsible phytosanitary strategy that must discourage first and foremost any preventive and systematic use of pesticides in crop protection.

This automatically excludes the use of seeds coated with neonicotinoid pesticides, and any treated or genetically engineered seeds made to express insecticides, because in the long run pesticide resistance will always outweigh the benefits of this short-term and suicidal strategy.

At stake is food security. Confronted with increased pesticide resistance and increasingly short-lived and expensive molecules, we need to reassess the choices that were made in relatively recent years.

A transition in this direction will probably come at a cost, but current farming practices also come with a cost that is accepted by European citizens and it is exactly for their benefit why the downward toxic spiral needs to come to an end.

Thank you for your attention.
