

High-level Discussion under the Auspices of the Belgian Presidency Speed-up Biocontrol Authorisation Knowledge, Know-how & Biocontrol for Farmers Now

Under the **auspices of the Belgian Presidency**, the International Biocontrol Manufacturers Association (IBMA) hosted a high-level biocontrol lunch, Tuesday 19 March, to reflect on biocontrol policy recommendations that will speed up authorisation and get biocontrol know-how and products to farmers now.

Discussions addressed:

- What are the short-term policy priorities to unlock biocontrol?
- What do farmers and landowners need to help uptake of biocontrol?
- What policy proposals should we advocate?

Event Context

There is broad consensus that we need to strengthen our food security in the European Union. A farming system that guarantees farmers a fair income, regenerates soil, protects biodiversity and reduces the effects of climate change as well as guarantee a sufficient production, are parts of the solutions. This will also involve transforming how we protect plants from pests and diseases.

Controlling pests and diseases is part of farming reality. Farmers in Europe have been slowly reducing the use of chemical pesticides since 2011 but are feeling the burden of insufficient access to alternatives such as biocontrol and other innovative Integrated Pest Management tools, and agroecological practices.

Biocontrol has been tried and tested and works in all farming programs and systems. It targets the problem directly, does not harm the crop, works against pest resistance, and leaves no residue. When a new biocontrol product is submitted, farmers must often wait up to ten years for them to be approved and available for use. Whereas farmers in the US and Brazil wait two or three years for a full safety evaluation and a final permit for use.

This disparity is seriously threatening the competitiveness of the biocontrol industry and wider agricultural sector. The current framework makes Europe unattractive for new investment and forces biocontrol companies whose investors require a satisfactory return on their investment, to de-prioritise Europe and to prioritise other markets. This in turn affects job growth in the green economy and worst of all it means farmers are prevented from accessing much needed alternatives putting them under even more pressure at a time when they need our support most.

The biocontrol sector in Europe is currently worth 1.6 billion Euro and there are over 100 substances in the biocontrol pipeline due to be submitted into the approval process before 2028. Once in the farmers' toolbox, they will provide effective pest and disease control on over 28 million hectares of which 23 million are arable crops, supporting Europe's food security and strategic autonomy.

To get biocontrol solutions to growers as fast as possible, IBMA calls for:

- **Green priority lane:** Create a priority lane for all alternative technologies to chemical pesticides.
- **Biological control registrations having no time limit (removal of re-registration process):** EU and MS workload is dominated by the re-registration programme reducing available time for new authorisations. Removal of the biological control re-registration programme reduces EU and MS workload and allows focus on new innovations. Safety of existing authorisations can be ensured through existing provisions under Article 56 of EU Reg (No.) 1107/2009.
- **Provisional authorisation:** Article 30 of EU Reg (No.) 1107/2009 provides for provisional authorisation. To reinstate this article for biological control would shorten time to authorisation to 2-3 years. This would materially improve the return on investment for biocontrol companies and provide certainty on time to market, so favouring investment in Europe. Provisional authorisation is not favoured by several Member States due to the perception of double work caused by re-opening the already completed evaluation from another Member States.
- **Facilitated label expansion:** Unlike chemical pesticides, effectiveness and safety of biological control is related more to the pest and disease, than the crop on which it is used so the label expansion process could be simplified. However, label expansions require use of agreed datapoints which are not available until after the re-registration process, highlighting again the crippling effects of the re-registration process which should be removed for biological control.
- **Farmer support for using biocontrol:** To optimise biocontrol performance, some adaptation to agronomic practices is often beneficial. Farmers should be rewarded for green transition activities.
- **Programmes for demonstrations on farm to create knowledge transfer:** Networks of farmers and landowners are the most efficient way of transferring knowledge and building biocontrol knowhow on farm.