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DREAM, VISION or REALITY, should the new political and economical order modify plant protection regulations

Some thoughts as support for the Brainstroming day of the OECD Working Group on
Pesticides
Paris, 4 February, 2002

The history of plant protection, is nothing else but a part of the history of techniques which have dramatically influenced the condition of humans life : an extraordinary epopy which, after centuries of slow evolution exposed exponentially during the last 150 years. Suddenly, techniques provided the power of solving problems, neglecting apparently the rules of biology and nature. Up to the discovery of DDT, farmers were confined with simple and naturally based compounds, often extremely toxic and harmful for the environnement. When synthetic pesticides have been discovered, they have been widely adopted in plant protection and public hygiene without restriction.

Unfortunately, the negative effects of the pesticides became obvious and the national authorities started to regulate their development and their use. Although plants, crops and pests have nothing to do with political entities, the different states edicted regulations and registration schemes.

- **These regulations were strongly influenced by local traditions, political and economical considerations.**
- **They were different from country to country**
- **Additionally, the regulations are obviously taking in consideration, almost exclusively, the chemical nature of the pesticides : chemical substances with lethal effects on insects, fungi, weeds etc.**

Due to the globalisation of the economy, since the same compounds can be produced, sold and used anywhere in the world, and because the environnemental problems have to be considered on a larger scale, important efforts of harmonization are undertaken, especcially on a regional basis (North America, European Union etc.) and at the same time under the cover of the OECD Pesticides Working Group.

Although alternative plant protection techniques, such as biological control of pests and diseases, have been developped by a large number of research institutions, due basically to economical, industrial and psychological reasons, their use have been restricted to niche markets, mostly covered crops. They account presently to less than 2% of the worldwide plant protection market (the exact data are missing, due to the lack of reliable market surveys)

- **Presently most of the harmonization efforts concern chemical pesticides, their risks for the environnement and the health of the population**

However since about 20 years, the consumers, thus the politicians, become to be concerned by more qualitative aspects. The questions of environment, safety, quality of life are taken more and more in consideration, leading to the adoption of political positions relative to sustainable development, sustainable agriculture.

- **The new agricultural and public health policies, are designed in order to dramatically boost a new type of agriculture : less productivity, more quality, more environment concern etc.**
- **The sustainable agriculture principles which are due to be the rule in the near future (10 years), at least in Europe and in America, will be strongly in line with the integrated crop production principles, as defined by both the International Organization fo Biological Control (IOBC) and the International Biocontrol Manufacturers Association (IBMA)**

The time is running out for lengthy considerations : the principles and therefore the policies leading to the development on large scale of integrated production systems require to :

1. promote safe and effective integrated crop protection recommendations
2. educate and train the farmers
3. inform properly the public (consumers)
4. create conditions which will enable the biological agents producers and distributors to grow under satisfactory economical conditions

The regulators have in this context a major role to be played :

- **the regulation for the introduction of biological control agents (microbials, macrobials, semiochemicals, eventually genetically modified organisms) must be specific, adapted to the nature of the agents, their targets and the environment where they will have to be used.**
- **they should not be any extrapolation of regulations valid for chemical pesticides**
- **the evaluation of registrations files must be made by experts in the field of environment and biology, less on chemistry**
- **less consideration has to be given to efficacy, more to acceptable risk and quality of the food produced**
- **the studies requested for supporting biocontrol registration should take in consideration the economic aspects, the environmental questions and the social impact of sustainable development.**
For example, the cost of studies could be economically acceptable in relation with the targeted markets, the potential amount of sales and the suitable time frame in which the products have to be brought to the users (replacement of harmful chemical pesticides).
- **Due to the huge amount of public research undertaken in the past and obviously in the future for biological plant protection, the results should be made available to industries, under suitable economic conditions as « public available data »,**
- **Taking in consideration that biology is a fast moving science, the decision of registration authorities should be able to be subject to appeal. Reputable international experts, or institutions, « Centers of Competences », can be nominated in order to provide such an expert evaluation of litigations.**
- **An international body (OECD biological plant care, biological public health working groups, FAO and WHO ?) should consider and harmonize regulatory aspects of international importance.**