



FAQ

1. What is at stake with the upcoming EU Regulation for a Sustainable Use of Pesticides?

The future EU Regulation for a Sustainable use of pesticides (SUR) is expected to initiate the much-needed transition to a climate- and biodiversity-friendly food system by setting a binding EU-wide pesticide reduction target of 50% by 2030. The publication of the Commission's proposal for the SUR was initially planned on 23 March, but was postponed until 22 June as a group of [12 Member States](#), the [French Agriculture Minister and private sector lobby groups](#) used the pretext of the war in Ukraine to pressure the Commission to withhold its proposal. In their view, the pesticide reduction target would have placed an additional burden on domestic food production at a time when global food security is endangered by the impacts of the war.

On the contrary, Civil Society Organisations and NGOs were supportive of the Commission's plan to keep the publication of the SUR on 23 March, arguing that this key element of the transition to a sustainable food system cannot wait any longer. In their view, it is precisely by supporting the reduction of pesticides that food security will be ensured, as a sustainable food system is more independent and resilient to global crises.

2. What is the Farm to Fork Strategy and why is it important for pesticide reduction?

The Farm to Fork (F2F) Strategy is at the heart of the European Green Deal, the EU's new growth strategy to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. The F2F strategy aims to make food systems fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly. The European Commission adopted the F2F strategy in May 2020. It is a non-legislative communication, which sets targets on pesticide reduction and organic farming development:

- a reduction by 50% of the use and risk of chemical pesticides and the use of more hazardous pesticides by 50% by 2030;
- reaching 25% of agricultural land under organic farming by 2030.

The European Commission has launched several legislative initiatives to implement the ambition of the strategy. On the pesticides front, the revision of the Directive for a Sustainable Use of pesticides (the SUD) will be the main lever to achieve the targets on pesticide reduction.

3. What is the SUD and why does the Commission propose to revise this legislation?

The SUD was adopted in 2009, with the aim to reduce the risks and impacts of pesticide use on human health and the environment and promoting the use of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and of alternative approaches or techniques in order to reduce dependency on the use of pesticides. Member States shall establish National Action Plans to implement the range of actions set out in the SUD.

[Audits, fact-finding work](#) and [implementation reports by the Commission](#), the [European Parliament report on the implementation of the SUD](#), and the [European Court of Auditors' special report on the SUD](#) conclude that very limited progress has been made in measuring and reducing the risks from pesticide use, and highlight weaknesses in the implementation, enforcement and monitoring of the SUD. Between 2011 and 2020, sales of pesticides in the EU remained relatively stable [\(± 6 % around the 350 000 tonnes per year mark\)](#).

The SUD is seen as a crucial tool to achieve the pesticide reduction targets outlined in the F2F Strategy. Since May 2020, the Commission has considered how to strengthen this legislation in order to provide the EU with an effective tool to achieve these targets.

4. What can we expect from the revision of the SUD?

The revised SUD is expected to become a Regulation. The Commission's proposal for a Regulation for a Sustainable use of pesticides (SUR) should be published on 22 June. It should include legally-binding targets for reducing by 50% by 2030 the use and risks of pesticides and the use of more hazardous pesticides at EU level. Member States should adopt national targets that will contribute to achieving the EU targets. They should adopt national action plans explaining how they will reach their national targets on pesticide reduction and how they intend to increase their organic farming area in order to contribute to the F2F strategy's target of achieving a 25% share of organic land at EU level by 2030.

5. What is the link between organic farming and the SUR?

In the current SUD, organic farming is recognised as low pesticide-input pest management. By definition, organic farming contributes to the overall objective of the SUD to reduce dependence on pesticides.

As a system approach to sustainable agriculture, organic farming aims to effectively manage ecological processes whilst minimising dependence on external inputs. Plant health in organic production is managed mainly by preventive and indirect measures internal to the agroecosystem. In case of necessity such measures may be complemented by external inputs, such as pesticides or fertilisers, but only if they are natural or naturally-derived substances. The use of synthetic pesticides is prohibited in organic farming. By preserving and enhancing the biodiversity, organic farmers benefit from a wide range of ecosystem services that avoid the use of natural inputs for crop protection in most arable crops and grassland. It has been shown that conversion to organic farming leads to a 97% reduction of pesticide input ([Mäder et al. \(2002\)](#)).

6. How is pesticide reduction measured by the EU and Member States?

In 2019, Member States adopted two harmonised risk indicators (HRI) to estimate the trends in risk from pesticide use. The HRI-1 is based on sales data of quantity of active substances and the HRI-2 is based on the number of emergency authorisations granted by Member States for substances that are no longer authorised by the EU (such as neonicotinoids).

[According to Eurostat](#), to calculate true risk indicators, it is necessary to establish toxicity and ecotoxicity levels for each active substance and combine these with relevant data on the quantities used and other information. The way in which pesticides are used (quantities, time and method of application, type of crop, type of soil, etc.) influences their effect on human health and the environment. However, apart from the crop type, statistics on these factors are not yet available because at the moment, statistical data on the agricultural use of pesticides are not harmonised on a European scale. Risk indicators have therefore been developed based on pesticide sales statistics and other data.

In line with the [recent recommendations by the European Court of Auditors](#), the Commission has committed to develop further indicators to better reflect the evolution of pesticide use, and associated risks, in the future and when data becomes available.

7. What is the difference between natural and synthetic substances?

Organic farming prohibits using synthetic pesticides. Only substances that already exist in nature can be used to protect crops, as a last resort after preventive measures. These natural substances can be derived from plant or animal origin, microorganisms, mineral compounds or semiochemicals (e.g. pheromones). Synthetic pesticides, on the other hand, contain active substances which were specifically designed by chemists to kill insects and fungi, and other harmful organisms and are newly introduced into ecosystems. Conventional farmers can use pesticides based on synthetic and natural substances, while organic farmers can only use pesticides based on natural substances.