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Report Name: EU Adopts Action Plan Towards Zero Pollution

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Report Category: Climate Change/Global Warming/Food Security, Policy and Program Announcements

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Report Highlights:

On May 12, 2021, the European Commission adopted the Commission adopted the EU Action Plan ‘Towards Zero Pollution for Air, Water and Soil’ as part of the European Green Deal to achieve zero pollution by 2050. To achieve this objective all sectors will have to play a role including agriculture through the reduction of ammonia pollution, pesticides pollution and nutrient losses.

General Information:

On May 12, 2021, the European Commission adopted the EU Action Plan ‘Towards Zero Pollution for Air, Water and Soil’ as part of the European Green Deal. The goal of the Action Plan is to achieve a zero-pollution vision for 2050: air, water and soil pollution are to be reduced to levels no longer considered harmful to health and natural ecosystems. To achieve this objective, the Action Plan lists targets for the EU to achieve by 2030, including:

- improving air quality to reduce the number of premature deaths caused by air pollution by 55 percent
- improving water quality by reducing waste, plastic litter at sea (by 50 percent) and microplastics released into the environment (by 30 percent)
- improving soil quality by reducing nutrient losses and chemical pesticides’ use by 50 percent
- reducing by 25 percent the EU ecosystems where air pollution threatens biodiversity

Commenting on the publication of the Action Plan, EU Executive Vice-President for the European Green Deal Frans Timmermans said: *“The Green Deal aims to build a healthy planet for all. To provide a toxic-free environment for people and planet, we have to act now. This plan will guide our work to get there. New green technologies already here can help reduce pollution and offer new business opportunities. Europe’s efforts to build back a cleaner, fairer, and more sustainable economy must likewise contribute to achieving the zero-pollution ambition.”*

Reducing pollution in agriculture

In the Action Plan, the Commission notes that the agricultural sector must play its part to reduce pollution.

Ammonia Pollution

Ammonia pollution is detrimental to air quality. For the Commission, the most cost-effective measures to cut its emissions all relate to agriculture, in particular to animal feeding practices, manure management and the use of fertilizers. The Commission has already announced in the Farm to Fork Strategy¹ that it will facilitate the placing on the market of alternative feed materials and innovative feed additives. The Commission also notes that [the revision of the Industrial Emissions Directive](#) (2021/2022) will aim to curb ammonia emissions from the intensive rearing of livestock. Copa-Cogeca, the organization representing EU farmers and cooperatives, [disagreed](#) with this approach, and noted that tackling ammonia pollution within agriculture through the extension of the scope of the Industrial Emissions Directive would entail double regulation and will not increase ambition but will only increase the administrative burden. The Commission also explains that the Common Agriculture Policy has a role to play to incite farmers to change their practices through national advisory services for farmers to build capacity for less polluting practices that could lead to a reduction of ammonia emissions.

Fertilizers and Pesticides

As part of the Action Plan, the Commission also calls for the EU to reduce by 50 percent nutrient losses compared to 2012-2015. The target, which will be part of the EU Nature Restoration Plan, shall ensure that there is no deterioration in soil fertility and will lead to 20 percent reduction of the use of fertilizers. The Commission also

¹ For more information about the Farm to Fork Strategy, please see GAIN Report, [Green Deal Strategies for the EU Agri-Food Sector Present a Politically Ambitious Policy Roadmap](#)

calls for a reduction by 50 percent of the use and risk of chemical pesticides and the use of the more hazardous ones by 2030 compared to 2011-2017. This target should be achieved through the revision of the Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive, proposals for stricter provisions on integrated pest management (IPM) and promotion of a greater use of safe alternative ways of protecting harvests from pests and diseases. This target was already part of the Farm to Fork Strategy². The Commission underlines the role that innovation techniques, including biotechnologies and new genomic techniques, could play to reduce the EU's dependency on pesticides.

Next steps

With the publication of the Pollution Action Plan, the European Commission reiterates its objective of reducing the use of fertilizers and pesticides in agriculture. The revision of the Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive is expected for the first quarter of 2022 while the legislative proposal for EU nature restoration targets is expected before the end of 2021.

Attachments:

No Attachments.

² For more information about pesticides in the Farm to Fork Strategy, please see GAIN Report [Pesticides Initiatives in the EU Farm to Fork Strategy](#)