



BRUSSELS, 9 May 2023

To:

Members of the European Parliament

Advancing on the implementation of the Farm to Fork strategy for better health and long-term benefits for farmers and everyone

Dear Member of the European Parliament,

Tomorrow morning you will be considering the role of farmers as enablers of the green transition and a resilient agricultural sector.

The Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) is the leading not-for-profit organization addressing how the natural and built environments affect health in the EU and beyond. With our over 90 member organisations and our health and medical network, we highlight the evidence on how environmental pollution puts health at risk, and work for health protective climate and environmental measures.

HEAL urges you to continue to support the implementation of the Farm to Fork strategy and to adopt a strong health-protective Regulation on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides (SUR), which is currently under negotiation in the European Parliament and among Agricultural Ministers.

Farmers, agricultural workers and their communities will be the first beneficiaries of a health-protective update of the EU pesticides rules, with a swift and significant reduction in the use of these hazardous substances. Improving the health of farmers today also means improving their long-term economic security, as they can keep their occupation for longer and in better conditions. In addition, reducing the use of harmful pesticides also contributes to securing a fertile and biodiversity rich soil, the prerequisite of farmers' long term revenues.

Pesticides used in the EU's agricultural production, and found in our food, water and air are a major health threat. The [body of evidence](#) on how hazardous pesticides harm our health keeps on growing.

The science underlines that pesticides can cause cancer, including non-Hodgkin lymphoma and prostate cancer in adults, as well as leukemia and tumors of the nervous system in children.

In the EU, cancer leads to 1 in 4 deaths and is the first cause of death at work. In the Beat Cancer Plan, the EU sets out four key action areas to reduce the number of deaths and suffering from cancer, including preventing environmental pollution. The health-protective update of the SUR is a major building block to achieving in this plan, [prevent cancer](#) and strengthening health resilience.

In addition to cancer, exposure to hazardous pesticides has also been linked to neurodegenerative disease

(including Parkinson), cognitive impairment, respiratory health disorders, harm to our bodies hormone system and regular hormone functioning, and reproductive disorders in adults; as well as neurodevelopmental and behavioural disorders in children. Pesticides can even alter DNA, leading to the passing of health risks through generations.

Across Europe, pesticides are a risk to everyone's health and well-being requiring urgent action. A 2022 [citizens' science project "Pesticide CheckUp"](#) with 300 participants from 15 European countries, supported by HEAL, showed that frequently used yet potentially health-harming pesticides were found in the hair of nearly every third person. The analysis only monitored for 6% of all pesticide active substances currently authorized in the EU.

There is unfortunately too little awareness of the major health impacts for farmers and farming communities from decades of pesticide use.

In France, farmers have come together in the Pesticide Victims network, to shed light on the health threat from pesticides and demand legal and financial compensation, as well as an urgent transition towards a pesticide-free and sustainable agricultural system. Their [stories](#) are most likely only the tip of the iceberg.

Shelving the draft SUR law would mean reversing the much needed [agricultural transformation](#) towards healthier and more sustainable food systems. It would not only be a disservice to people's health and environmental resilience across Europe, but also a missed opportunity for significant economic and financial gains for individual farmers and the entire agricultural sector over the long run.

Based on the above, HEAL calls on you to support progress on the SUR development, by continuing the negotiations for a swift and significant reduction in pesticides use.

We thank you for your commitment for the protection of farmers' health today and for future generations, and we remain available for any further questions.

Yours sincerely,



Genon K. Jensen
Executive Director
Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL)

The Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) is the leading not-for-profit organisation addressing how the environment affects human health in the European Union (EU) and beyond. HEAL works to shape laws and policies that promote planetary and human health and protect those most affected by pollution, and raise awareness on the benefits of environmental action for health.

HEAL's over 90 member organisations include international, European, national and local groups of health professionals, not-for-profit health insurers, patients, citizens, women, youth, and environmental experts representing over 200 million people across the 53 countries of the WHO European Region.

As an alliance, HEAL brings independent and expert evidence from the health community to EU and global decision-making processes to inspire disease prevention and to promote a toxic-free, low-carbon, fair and healthy future.

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