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Pesticides - An explosive cocktail

Trust the Greens for non-contaminated food

Thanks to the Greens, EU legislation on pesticides has been significantly strengthened. Pesticides that are carcinogenic, mutagenic or damage reproduction will be phased out in Europe, unless exposure to them is negligible. Persistent, bioaccumulative and toxic substances (PBTs) will not be reapproved. The protection of bees has also been improved and there will be stricter safety criteria for pesticides that are immunotoxic or harmful to the development of the nervous system. However, a lot still needs to be done.

In Europe, more and more foodstuffs are contaminated with various residues of pesticides. This is particularly true for fruit and vegetables, with statistics indicating a clear trend towards multiple residues. Scientists are still quarrelling about the risks linked to these cocktails, but ever more signs for cumulative and synergistic effects between pesticide residues, with possibly consequences for public health, are on the record. Toxicologists are used to examine the effects of single substances, and to assess their safety in an isolated setting. However, it is obvious that different substances used on the fields can also cumulate in foods and lead to undesired toxic effects on our plate.

Moreover, the residues detected in regular monitoring, while serious enough in themselves, are likely to seriously underestimate the real level contamination: only around half of the pesticides currently used can be detected by routine chemical analytic methods. For this reason, the Greens are calling for comprehensive monitoring so that all residues in food and in the environment are effectively measured, and not just those detectable with multi-residue methods.

Pesticide residues are not inevitable: organic farmers do not use chemical pesticides at all. And numerous conventional farmers, who have subscribed to pesticide reduction programmes, prove that pesticides are only a last resort in a series of measures of careful crop protection. Provided that adapted crop varieties are chosen, that the soil is kept healthy through sustainable crop rotation and that the benefits of predators are availed of, pesticide use can be substantially reduced or even avoided. It is therefore essential that compulsory programmes for the reduction of pesticide use are put in place in all member states.

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