

Conclusions from the Panel Discussion “National Action Plans for Pesticide Reduction: The role of Biocontrol” of 25th October 2016, within the Annual Biocontrol Industry Meeting in Basel, Switzerland.

BIOCONTROL PLAYS AN IMPORTANT ROLE FOR REDUCING PESTICIDE USE AND RISKS

Biocontrol technologies have significantly advanced and can play an important role in reducing pesticide use and risks. However, their registration and authorization is often hampered by lengthy procedures tailored to chemical inputs. In order to enhance the uptake of biocontrol, their market introduction needs to be facilitated. Collaboration between businesses, farmer organizations, policy makers and sustainability standards is needed to inform and sensitize producers as well as consumers.

What biocontrol has on offer

The dynamic biocontrol industry offers farmers a range of tools (macrobiotics, microbials, semiochemicals and naturals) for alternative pest and disease control. Products like pheromones for mating disruption are proven to be highly effective if properly used, while other biocontrol applications depend on a combination with additional preventive measures. Biocontrol products play an important role in integrated pest management (IPM) where they are the preferred option if preventive measures alone are not sufficient, while chemical control should be used only as the last resort. Biocontrol products offer farmers a much needed expansion of their toolboxes particularly in light of higher pest and disease pressure due to climate change and increasing resistance against chemical pesticides. They therefore may contribute to reducing food losses while fulfilling consumer expectations for low pesticide residues.

Obstacles for enhancing the uptake of biocontrol

The use of biocontrol inputs requires an increased level of know-how and awareness among farmers. Unfortunately, vocational training and extension are often still focused on chemical crop protection. The main obstacle, however, is that newly developed biocontrol solutions are not available to farmers because their registration and authorization is hampered by lengthy and costly procedures. Although most biocontrol inputs involve low risks they currently need to pass similar procedures and requirements as chemical products, resulting in delays of up to four years, and high costs. The US and Canada already have fast-track procedures for low-risk inputs in place, and the EU recently identified measures to increase low-risk plant protection product availability. This shows that the regulatory framework can be improved in collaboration with the concerned stakeholders.

How to enhance the uptake of biocontrol

National Action Plans on sustainable crop protection are a step in the right direction, but are not sufficient. Regulation has its limitations, since prohibition of certain inputs or mandatory use of others may not be appropriate in each context and may have unwanted financial implications for farmers.

More promising is it to encourage desired behaviour (e.g. through subsidies or taxes), and to ensure that farmers have access to suitable alternatives and to the required know-how. Stakeholders can contribute to enhancing the uptake of biocontrol in various ways:

- Governments can support the use of proven biocontrol methods and work towards facilitating registration and authorization of low-risk plant protection inputs by introducing fast-track procedures and reduced fees.
- Farmer organizations and sustainability initiatives should focus extension activities on integrated pest management and biocontrol by facilitating practical demonstration and knowledge exchange among farmers.
- Retailers can enhance the uptake of alternative pest management by adapting their sourcing requirements, promoting sustainability labels and sensitizing consumers (including hobby gardeners) on the related issues.

The panel discussion was organized by HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation in collaboration with the Annual Biocontrol Industry Meeting (ABIM) and the Research Institute of Organic Farming (FiBL), with support by Mercator Foundation Switzerland and the Swiss Federal Office for Agriculture FOAG.

Panel composition

- Eva Reinhard, Deputy Director, Swiss Federal Office for Agriculture FOAG
- Vittorio Veronelli, Vice President, International Biocontrol Manufacturer Association IBMA / CEO of CBC Europe
- Manfred Bötsch, Head of Department of Sustainability and Quality Management, MIGROS Switzerland
- Indira Moreno Echeverri, Pest Management Expert, UTZ Certified / IPM Coalition
- Cesar Gonzalez, Policy Advisor, Copa/Cogeca
- Moderator: Frank Eyhorn, Senior Advisor Sustainable Agriculture, Helvetas

Further information is available at www.helvetas.ch/pesticides

