

An open letter to European policymakers and elected officials

3rd June 2016

Dear Sir/Madam,

The reauthorisation of glyphosate

From their fields, yards and orchards across the UK, farmers are following the ongoing debate on the re-approval of glyphosate with mounting concern. To our minds, it comes down to a very simple question: what do we need? What do we need to keep providing people with food, our businesses viable and deliver other public goods that come from farming?

First and foremost we need a regulatory process that is based on solid, scientific evidence that is well scrutinised by an independent body and based on risk assessment. Indeed such a process for the registration of plant protection products has delivered a recommendation for the continued use of glyphosate. However, we need all elected officials and policymakers in national and European parliaments and institutions to respect the process. The ongoing situation has already severely damaged the credibility of the European Food Safety Authority and as a consequence has eroded confidence and certainty in the regulatory system. It is deeply worrying that a decision that has very real consequences on millions of peoples' everyday lives is the subject of political bargaining. We urge a return to evidence-led policymaking that is insulated from political swings and based on fair scientific risk assessment. Without this, we worry that doubt is unfortunately cast on the ability for the EU to deliver for farmers.

Secondly, European farmers need glyphosate to provide a safe, secure and affordable food supply while increasingly responding to consumer demand for greater environmental sensitivity. Glyphosate is subject to regulation, as with all other pesticides, so that it is not found in dangerous quantities in the food chain. It is also an essential tool used in farming practices that actually improve soil structure and require less work with machinery; thus helping reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Furthermore, application pre-harvest not only ensures the quality of the crop, but also means that less drying after harvest is required. This naturally reduces fuel and electricity usage, in turn lowering costs and minimising greenhouse gas emissions. For environmental conservation too; the substance is used worldwide to manage vegetation to create biodiverse habitats. For whatever application, farmers are subject to the EU's Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive. This ensures that we are certified to use these products and adopt strategies that seek to limit the risks

of their use. Thereby we are allowed to access essential products which we need to produce while at the same time being regulated to use them responsibly.

Finally, the removal of such a tool carries the very real risk of yet another pressure on our incomes at a time when economic returns are already severely squeezed. The arable sector will likely be hardest hit through any restrictions, with direct impacts on yields. Loss of availability in the livestock and dairy sectors would result in an inability to tackle invasive and poisonous species in grassland and plant pests and diseases across all farm types. These effects would directly hit farmers' margins too. Europe would therefore be at a further disadvantage to other nations, who face no such restrictions, but who we are increasingly trading with. Farmers are being asked the impossible. On one hand farmers are encouraged to improve and compete, yet we have tools that allow us to do so directly threatened with no like-for-like alternatives in place.

We therefore call on all policy makers and officials to seriously take into account the points we raise here. In our view there is no well-reasoned argument holding back a full reauthorisation of glyphosate in line with the regulatory process. We fear that without such a course of action there would be grave consequences for European agriculture that will resonate for years.

Thank you for your consideration.

On behalf of 70,000 farmers, their families and livelihoods:




Meurig Raymond
President, National Farmers Union



Allan Bowie
President, National Farmers Union of Scotland



Stephen James
President, NFU Cymru



Barclay Bell
President, Ulster Farmers Union