

Voluntary Report – Voluntary - Public Distribution

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Report Name: New French Pesticide Buffer Zone Regulation Angers French Farmers and NGOs

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Report Category: Agriculture in the News, Sanitary/Phytopsanitary/Food Safety, Policy and Program Announcements

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Report Highlights:

After months of debate, in December 2019 France announced required no-pesticide buffer zones between treated crops and inhabited areas. This zoning angers French farmers who see their livelihood threatened and NGOs who feel the new regulations do not go far enough. The policy will likely further erode the competitiveness of French agriculture and widen the divide between French farmers and rural-non-farmers and urban consumers.

France debated pesticide usage and buffer zones throughout 2019

French environmental NGOs claim that the use of phytosanitary products by farmers in the proximity of houses, schools and other buildings create a health hazard. Beginning in the summer of 2019, they demanded the Government of France (GOF) to ban the use of chemicals near occupied structures. Some NGOs such as [Generation Futures](#) advocated for a 100 or 150 meters buffer zone (i.e. zones in the fields close to inhabited areas where farmers would be prohibited to spray their crops) . NGOs also requested that farmers notify neighbors of fields ahead of spraying their crops. Several mayors passed legislation banning the uses of pesticides in their town. However, administrative courts struck down these local laws because banning pesticide use is not within the regulatory powers of localities. French media supported these efforts by featuring stories of people who (unscientifically) linked their own disease (such as cancer) to use of pesticides nearby.

Farmers and their representatives have been adamantly opposed to any buffer zone. Setting 150 meters buffer zones would remove upwards of 4.5 million hectares (11.25 million acres), close to 15 percent of France's total crop area, from cultivation. In some regions such as Champagne, crops such as vineyards are so intertwined with villages and buildings that setting significant buffer zones would leave the entire crop defenseless against pests.

The battle over pesticide buffer zones is playing our visibly on French social media. It highlights the growing rural-urban divide and has widened the ideological gap between farmers and non-farmers in France. Farmers denounce the attitude of those people who move from congested urban cities to the countryside for the better environment but refuse to accept the nuisances created by farming activities such as pesticide use, noise from farm machinery and natural smells from animal production. The primary French farmers union organized several nationwide demonstrations in October and November denouncing what they perceived as a significant #agribashing trend.

The GOF announced a public consultation in late October 2019. At least 53,000 people submitted comments (but neither the content of the comments nor the conclusion of the consultation have been made public yet). The GOF also confirmed that it would base its decision on science. The French Food and Environment Safety Agency (ANSES) had proposed a [5 and 10 metter buffer zone](#) in June 2019.

New buffer zones set by the Ministry of Agriculture

The French Ministry of Agriculture announced a new no-pesticide zoning regulation in line with ANSES recommendation on December 20, 2019. This regulation, applicable January 1, 2020, sets widths of buffer zones close to inhabited areas where applying pesticides is prohibited. It applies to all crops in proximity of inhabited areas as well as areas where vulnerable people may work (such as schools or pension homes). The [decree](#) establishing this zoning regulation was published on December 27, 2019. A 20-meter buffer zone is required when a farmer sprays phytosanitary products labeled as carcinogenic, mutagenic, reprotoxic. Those products bear the following danger signs on their labels (in reference to [EU regulation 1272/2008](#)) : H300, H310, H330, H331, H334, H340, H350, H350i, H360, H360F, H360D, H360FD, H360Fd H360Df, H370 and H372. The same 20-meter buffer zone width applies to products containing an active compound considered as an endocrine disruptor. For other

phytosanitary products, the French decree sets buffer zones of 10 meters in case of tree fruit crops, vineyards, forests, hops, bananas and any other horticultural crop above 50 cm of height. For other crops, the buffer zone is set at 5 meters. Those 10 and 5 meters thresholds can be lowered to 5 and 3 meters when farmers use techniques to reduce drift or exposure to drift by at least 66% compared to the normal conditions of spraying. In the case of viticulture, the buffer zones can be reduced from 10 meters to 3 meters when the reduction rate reaches 90%. The Ministry of Agriculture has published a [list of tools and techniques](#) to achieve these reduction rates.

The Ministry has announced that 25 million euros will be available to help farmers who want to invest in better spraying equipment. The GOF will also fund a 14 million-euro, 4-year research study on the exposure of local residents to phytosanitary products. It will include environmental measurements in the outdoor air and in the houses of people living near agricultural areas. The GOF is also encouraging farmers through their unions and their chambers of agriculture and municipalities to sign good conduct charters. Farmers are encouraged to increase dialogue with neighbors, including advance notice of treatments and spraying.

Nobody is satisfied by the new regulations

French farmers unanimously decried the Ministry's announcement. Several farmers posted on social media that they will never follow the regulation unless duly compensated for any losses associated with the loss of land or losses from infestations. Some noted that the Ministry had waited a few days before the holiday season to announce the zoning in order to reduce the political backlash. The largest French farmers union, FNSEA, denounced the decree as unacceptable for French farmers and has called on all farmers to stop accepting waste from municipal sewage and waste water treatment plants, which will cause problems for towns and cities who rely on farmers as a means of waste disposal. Environmentalists and NGOs were also dissatisfied with the GOF's announcement, having lobbied for much wider buffer zones. Some activists said that they were looking at taking the decree to court as they believe the French decree undercuts EU regulations to protect neighbors from pesticide contamination.

Buffer zones will decrease the competitiveness of French agriculture

FAS Paris projects that the GOF decision will likely erode the competitiveness of French agriculture. It will lower cultivated areas by at least a few thousand hectares and increase the risk of pest infestation in crops originating from untreated areas, thus increasing the potential for crop losses and the spread of disease. FAS Paris also projects the continuing controversy will widen the divide between French farmers and rural-non-farmers and urban consumers.

Attachments:

No Attachments.