

European Research Alliance towards a Chemical Pesticide-Free Agriculture

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Position paper on Green Deal call Area 6 - Farm to Fork

The European Research Alliance towards a Chemical Pesticide-Free Agriculture is the fruit of the joint declaration of intent signed by 33 members from 20 European Countries. This unprecedented endeavour has brought the European research community together around this ambitious vision of an agriculture free of chemical pesticides.

The Alliance aims at contributing to a sustainable European agri-food system free of chemical pesticides through a transdisciplinary research and innovation agenda. This objective is aligned with the 'European Green Deal' priorities to deliver an environment-friendly, sustainable, fair, just and competitive agri-food sector across the whole value chain. These activities are particularly concerned by the '*Farm to Fork*' strategy of the European Green Deal as well as the '*Zero Pollution*' and '*Biodiversity 2030*' strategies.

1/ Position on the European Green Deal

The Alliance shares the transforming vision and the ambitious objectives supported by the European Green Deal.

The Alliance recognizes the work undertaken by the Commission services for several months, in order to elaborate the actions plans and the call areas. The method used is particularly appreciated, promoting the dialogue between the concerned General Directorates and involving the relevant actors. This approach will allow creating a coherent and ambitious roadmap and will have an important impact on the European citizens.

2/ Position on the topic 'Testing and demonstrating systemic innovations for sustainable food from farm to fork' of the Area 6 - Farm to Fork

The Alliance encourages the Commission services to allocate sufficient funding to meet all the ambitious challenges of the Farm to Fork Strategy. The Farm to Fork strategy is at the heart of the European Green Deal as it involves the whole value chain (e.g. farmers, cooperatives, logistics providers, industry, producers, food processors and consumers) and poses transversal challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and the degradation of land and sea. This strong ambition to transform the entire European food systems should reflect on Area 6 of the European Green Deal Call, with more allocated topics and ambitious funding.

In order to ensure projects that would remain coherent and manageable of this call area, the Alliance recommends more adequately balancing the different challenges. In particular, the third challenge targets issues related to pesticide, antibiotics and fertilizers at once. If we aim at achieving the objective ‘to take additional action to reduce the overall use and risk of chemical pesticides by 50% by 2030’¹ stated in the Farm to Fork strategy, this challenge should be addressed through several distinct projects. Only this separate attribution can have a considerable impact in the short term, up to the figures targeted for 2030.

In order to maximize the impact of this call area, the Alliance suggests splitting up the challenge 3 and attributing at least two projects for each of the challenges, as listed below:

- 1) Achieving climate neutral farms (on land, water and sea) by reducing GHG emissions and by increasing farm-based carbon sequestration and storage;
- 2) Achieving climate neutral food businesses by mitigating climate change, reducing energy use and increasing energy efficiency in processing, distribution, conservation and preparation of food;
- 3) Reducing the dependence on chemical and hazardous pesticides;
- 4) Reducing the dependence of antibiotics;
- 5) Reducing the use and increasing the efficiency of fertilisers; reducing the losses of nutrients from fertilisers, towards zero pollution;
- 6) Reducing food losses and waste, while avoiding unsustainable packaging;
- 7) Shifting to sustainable healthy diets, sourced from land, water and sea, and accessible to all EU citizens, including the most deprived and vulnerable groups.

The Alliance insists on the necessity of research activities to achieve the expected impact through systemic approaches.

The systems approaches ‘to define the challenge, including in-depth systemic analyses of its drivers and root causes’ and ‘to develop approaches and roadmaps to promote their uptake and upscaling in the EU’ mentioned in this topic clearly requires strong research activities and calls for a RIA project.

Research activities are also essential for the identification of barriers blocking the systemic transition and levers enabling it. The development and sharing of knowledge are necessary to carrying out technical, economic, social and environmental evaluations of the agri-food systems.

The deployment of a place-based approach requires in-depth systemic analyses of the drivers and root causes, in every geographical and sectoral context, which cannot be undertaken through an IA project.

Given the heterogeneity of agricultural systems across the EU, the Alliance points out the importance not to limit the TRL scaling in order to allow a wider spread of innovative solutions, including the promising lower TRL-innovations through optimization. Testing and demonstrating will not be sufficient, one of the main challenges will be to optimize the existing solutions, accounting for the local – pedo-climatic and socio-economic – conditions. These activities will also require research activities formally corresponding to RIA and TRL 4-8.

The Alliance is aware of the importance of the economic, social and environmental foundations of food and nutrition security for current and future generations. The network of more than 250 experimental fields/farms, spread over 7000 ha, and access to thousands of farms through networks such as Dephy

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/actions-being-taken-eu/farm-fork_en

(FR), PestiRed (CH), DIPS (DE), ÖMKi On-farm Living Lab (HU) that the Alliance has at its disposal will allow to achieve a sustainable transition without prejudice to the economic performance of farms and sectors.

Moreover, the Alliance members gather a strong community of researchers and engineers working on topics related to pesticide reduction and have contributed to more than 1360 European research projects, including recently granted projects focusing on IPM farm networks² and agroecology living labs³. These initiatives constitute a steady basis that have the ability to meet the issues raised by the European Green Deal.

The Alliance insists on the importance of transdisciplinary research with all the actors of the value chain, including fundamental research and co-developed innovative solutions. European and national research efforts must be aligned with the ambition stated in the Farm to Fork strategy in order to effectively meet the expectations of European citizens.

² Call 'SC2 SFS-06-2018-2020: Stepping up integrated pest management - scope B: EU-wide demonstration farm network'.

³ Call 'SC2 FNR-01-2020: Strengthening the European agroecological research and innovation ecosystem'.