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PRESS STATEMENT

UNFIT FOR PURPOSE: THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S PROPOSAL FOR A SUSTAINABLE USE OF PLANT PROTECTION PRODUCTS REGULATION

On 25 April the International Confederation of European Beet Growers (CIBE) and the European Association of Sugar Manufacturers (CEFS) hosted an event at the European Parliament on the Commission's proposal for a revision of the Sustainable Use of Plant Protection Products Regulation (SUR). The event, entitled "Sustainable Use of Plant Protection Products: How to make the proposal fit for purpose?", was presided over by Austrian MEP Alexander Bernhuber.

Bernard von Wüllerstorff and Guillaume Gandon, farmers of arable crops from Belgium and France respectively, gave testimonials on the implementation and challenges of Integrated Pest Management (IPM). This was followed by a roundtable discussion with Markus Schöberl, Director of the Austrian Sugar Beet Growers' Association, and Max Schulman, Farmer and Vice-Chair of Working Party Seeds at COPA-COGECA.

Speakers urged policymakers to take a realistic view of the consequences the current SUR proposal would have on EU agriculture and especially on beet sugar production. Alexander Bernhuber MEP agreed: "The EU Commission's proposed reduction plans would have a significant negative impact on domestic agriculture, particularly on crops like sugar beet, as it would lead to a shift in production to third countries. This move would make the EU increasingly reliant on sugar imports from overseas, which is concerning. We urge the EU Commission to adopt a more sustainable food policy. Safeguarding EU food security must become a top priority in EU legislation."

Bernard von Wüllerstorff, farmer from Belgium, explained how he implemented IPM and said: "We are not advocating for the status quo – the environment is for everyone and needs to be protected. However, farmers need to be able to financially survive this transition. The reduction of yields foreseen by the implementation of the SUR targets would wipe out farmers' margins and drive them out of business."

Guillaume Gandon, farmer from France, explained how the decline in available plant protection products is undermining beet sugar production. The effects are already showing: 10% of French farmers decided to stop growing beet this year, notably due to the lack of availability of neonicotinoids. He provided examples to illustrate why reducing plant protection products arbitrarily and making their use practically impossible will cause major economic and ecological difficulties.

Farmers urgently need effective, implementable, and affordable alternatives to plant protection products. If no effective alternatives are available, supply chains will crumble, ultimately leading to the disappearance of local European products. Max Schulman, Farmer and Vice-Chair of Working Party Seeds at COPA-COGECA, said: "We at COPA-COGECA have insisted that viable alternatives are required for farmers now. It takes time to adjust to new techniques, for example biological alternatives."

The consequences of a lack of alternatives to plant protection reach far beyond the field. Markus Schöberl, Director of the Austrian Sugar Beet Growers Association, warned: "Sugar beet cultivation will become impossible in many areas in Europe if further active substances disappear. The European Commission must opt for an agricultural policy that ensures the security of supply for the European population and enables sustainable production of local food products."