



Glyphosate – a short term fix

Glyphosate has become a core tool for assisting the successful establishment of forest transplants – but we very nearly lost it!

Despite the success of the populist European Citizens Initiative which drew some 1.4 million votes supporting a ban on glyphosate and triggering a debate in the European parliament, eventually a reasonably acceptable compromise on the future of glyphosate was reached.

After all the deliberation and obfuscation, on 27 November 2017 the European Commission granted glyphosate a five year reprieve, but some 10 years shorter than the usual 15 year renewal period. Glyphosate products will therefore be with us at least until December 2022.

The favourable outcome was in doubt until the day of decision, as had Germany continued to abstain, then approval would have been refused. Fortunately, it appears that the failure of the Green Party to enter a coalition government with Mrs Merkel, freed the hand of the German Agriculture Minister to vote for renewal, this just tipping the balance to a positive result.

The UK did vote for renewal, despite some reportedly very unhelpful remarks from our Minister for the Environment. Agriculture Minister, George Eustace, though, has continued to be supportive, and UK support was essential to counter the adverse votes from Italy and France.

France continues to fiercely oppose the use of glyphosate and President Macron has vowed to ban the product in France within three years – or sooner if alternatives are found. This, though, is probably unlikely, and judging on past experience, even

if French use was banned, there would be enough helpful loopholes to facilitate continued use by French farmers and foresters.

Somewhat incredibly there are currently some 302 glyphosate products approved for use in UK forests and forest nurseries, and if these are to remain on the UK market, then each manufacturer or supplier will have to submit a renewal application before 15 March 2018. Hopefully most will have already prepared their dossiers, but inevitably there will be some fallout, and therefore a reduced number of products available for use.

We understand that Monsanto will be supporting most of its popular products including Roundup ProActive – but some of the more marginal products may not be renewed as, for example, Monsanto has to submit over 560 product applications over the 28 EC member states.

Once the EC Central Zone member state nominated to assess the core dossier has completed the evaluation, then each member state will grant national approvals. These will include the conditions of authorisation, which will have to take account of the Commission's provisions to ensure that home/garden use is safe, and that biodiversity is not harmed. This may cause a little of a dilemma for those states who voted against renewal – Belgium, Greece, France, Croatia, Italy, Cyprus, Luxemburg, Malta and Austria as they HAVE to renew use of the product, although they may impose restrictions on its use.

So what was all the fuss about?

It was all triggered by the decision by the flawed IARC assessment on glyphosate to categorise it as a "probable carcinogen", putting it in the same category as

high temperature fat frying and hairdressing. Even the IARC, though, didn't classify glyphosate as a "known carcinogen" which includes alcohol, tobacco, the birth pill and diesel engine exhaust. So, where was the Citizens Initiative to ban these dangers to public health?

The IARC, however, was pretty isolated in its view, as the parent body the World Health Organisation, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the European Food Safety Authority, Health Canada and all the major regulatory bodies consider that "glyphosate is unlikely to be carcinogenic".

But what will happen in five years' time?

Well, there will be increased impetus to look at alternative methods of weed control, but all the likely front runners such as steam, hot water and organic acids will only burn off the top growth, and are unlikely to provide long term vegetation control.

Hopefully, in 2022 good science will prevail over politics - but don't bank on it...



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Pesticides helpline is a free service operated by Confor's crop protection adviser Colin Palmer on behalf of Confor members. Colin can be contacted 8am to 8pm Mondays to Fridays on 01531 633500 (leave a message if necessary) or by email to: branchline@xln.co.uk



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