

# Chemical changes – reasons to be cheerful

It's time to stop moaning about pesticide legislation, says **Chris Wallwork**, technical manager of UAP – it's not all bad news

It's about time we stopped moaning about changes in pesticide legislation. OK, we've lost a lot of old products, but the industry does tend to ignore the good news – and there has been quite a bit this year.

For farmers and growers, changes in world food prices and exchange rates have led to improved prices on arable crops and increases in home production of horticultural crops. The Red Tractor Scheme has simplified paperwork, especially for those who are involved in a range of crop types. It is also clear that public concern about pesticides is much lower than a few years ago (although E coli outbreaks have raised the profile of microbiological issues.)

Although the products that disappeared because of the European review of pesticides and 91/414 have caused problems for UK growers and agronomists, we've been let off relatively lightly. Many countries in southern Europe have lost a far greater proportion of their pesticides, because they were still using materials we banned years ago in the UK. The big rush of changes as the 91/414 Directive drew to a close has hit them really hard – and it's difficult not to draw a degree of satisfaction from this levelling of the playing field.

The new European pesticide authorisation regulation (1107/2009) has now started to replace 91/414. Although it tightens up some controls, it is nowhere near as bad as it might have been (thanks in no small part to lobbying by the UK industry). It also opens possibilities for more pesticides to come to the UK as a result of its zonal authorisations. This will particularly benefit horticultural producers, as the UK is in the same zone as Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands.

The Sustainable Use Directive has also now started to take effect. This is the legislation that caused a lot of fuss a couple of years ago. But a lot of lobbying and letters to MEPs helped ensure that the end result was sensible. Again, it results in a levelling of the playing field for pesticide users across Europe. But, as UK farmers were already complying with much higher standards than their European competitors, the pain is nearly all being felt across the Channel. We might complain about the paperwork that goes with BASIS, Red Tractor, NRoSO and other schemes – but something similar is just about to hit our neighbours for the first time!

Even the supermarkets are showing signs of a slightly more pragmatic approach. Moves towards the idea of “residue free food” disappeared when retailers discovered that you can't have both “residue free” and “pest and disease free” if you want low prices. In an odd way, the increased sensitivity of residue tests has also helped this process. An apple or a cabbage that may have



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appeared to be free of residues a few years ago now shows minute traces of several pesticides, so any claim of “zero residues” would be too risky for them. “Safe food” is essential, but “residue free” food is a luxury that comes with costs – and caterpillars!

Although the loss of many older pesticides has hurt growers, for agrochemical manufacturers the resulting chance of selling adequate volumes of newer materials means that they are more willing to bring these products into the UK. With many of these newer materials as effective at much lower doses, spraying a block of cereals no longer requires a trailer-load of cans, or the subsequent disposal problems.

There are still a few problems working through the system. The UK authorities do still tend to interpret the rules much more strictly than in countries just across the Channel, so still need regular reminders that food production must be practical.

Wheat bulb fly could become much less reliably controlled if dimethoate loses this approval (which seems likely), as there are no obvious replacements with equivalent activity. Straight clocyralid products are losing all autumn uses because of risks to watercourses – which will again make life difficult for some farmers.

Mecoprop + DFF (Pixie) will probably not be available beyond next spring which could make the autumn control of volunteer rape and beans in winter cereals much more difficult – although this is a case where the gap in the market is prompting some agchem manufacturers to develop other options, so there are still reasons to be cheerful.

