

## **Pesticide residues in ACP countries: How the process of harmonizing regulations on pesticide residues in EU can affect crop protocols in ACP countries?**

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Some 480,000 tonnes of fresh fruit and vegetables are exported yearly to the European Union (excluding bananas and South Africa), with import value of around €900 million. It is estimated that the sector provides a living, directly or indirectly, for 7 million people. In ACP countries (mainly West and East Africa), the sector of fresh fruit and vegetable exports is faced with serious difficulties:

- ❑ the growing demand of European distributors in terms of - quality and safety of - products they sell (vegetables, exotic fruits),
- ❑ the harmonization of European regulations on pesticide residues currently under way (Maximum Residue Limits -MRL- harmonization in EU). As the existence in the European Union of national MRLs can be a source of trade problems for ACP exporters and importers from third countries, - the European Commission came forward with a proposal to harmonise all MRLs at European level and prevent Member States from setting MRLs unilaterally; the regulation (396/2005) is currently being adopted and is slated to enter into force in 2006.
- ❑ a large number of active substances used today in ACP Crop Protocols are no more used or have been withdrawn in EU ; it has been decided that default MRLs as well as MRLs of European withdrawn products will be established at 0.01mg/kg (LOQ) ! If pesticides MRLs in fresh produce are exceeded, the importer introducing the product onto the European market will be held liable and severely penalised (“Due Diligence” principle).

To avoid incurring such a serious risk, importers will rely on ACP suppliers that can prove that they are MRL compliant ; exporting fruits and vegetables on the European market without respecting MRLs is not possible anymore. Therefore it is imperative that ACP countries fresh fruit and vegetable producers and exporters comply with these regulatory and commercial requirements as soon as possible. If they fail to do so, they are in danger of losing their market shares in the EU, which would threaten not only an important source of earnings for the ACP countries but also jobs of a large number of smallholders employed in the sector.

It is now critical for ACP producers to amend their Crop Protocols, with well known maximum pesticide doses they may use and PHI allowed on their crops, in order to achieve optimum residue levels and to demonstrate as quickly as possible that their fresh produce conforms with food safety requirements. Companies able to offer such

guarantees will have strong commercial advantage and increase importers' confidence.

As most of the ACP crops dealt with by PIP are minor crops, plant protection products manufacturers, not really attracted by the market size for pesticides, have not been keen in applying for specific MRLs on these crops and hence, to comply with MRLs regulation, ACP producers have an urgent need of residue trials to cover MRLs/Import Tolerances for their exotic fruits and vegetables crops such as okra, passion fruit, mangoes, pineapples,... If Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) for the crop grown outside the EU differs from that applied in the EU, resulting in a residue value greater than the harmonised European MRL, it is possible to apply for an Import Tolerance greater than the existing MRL, provided this IT has no negative effects on consumer health. If the Import Tolerance is approved, it will replace the European MRL in force and is valid for both imports and European production.

The COLEACP/Pesticides Initiative Programme (PIP) was set up by the European Union at the request of the ACP Group of States (Africa-Caribbean-Pacific) in order to forestall any negative effects on the ACP export sector resulting from ongoing regulatory changes in the EU and ensure the sector's long-term sustainability. The PIP intends to respond to applications from private companies in the ACP fresh fruit and vegetable export sector who are confronted with strengthening of European buyers' requirements in terms of food safety (pesticide residues) and traceability, mainly by helping them to revise their agricultural practices (GAPs) and implement food safety and traceability systems. Today, the PIP works with companies from around 20 ACP countries and covers a variety of crops, including pineapple, green beans, mango, avocado, okra, cherry tomato, melon, passion fruit, papaya, lychee, yam, chilli peppers and others (cumulative volume amounts to  $\pm 400,000$  tonnes/year or  $\pm 80\%$  of exported products besides banana).

In parallel with activities directly concerning companies and support structures, the PIP also works on an ongoing basis with EU regulatory authorities, particularly the European Commission's DG Health and Consumer Protection. For over two years, the PIP has been conducting with local service providers a large-scale programme of residue trials in a number of African countries (Senegal, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Kenya) on the main crops exported by ACP countries to the EU (french beans, pineapples, papaya, okra, mango and cherry tomato). The aim of the PIP programme is to draw up Crop Protocols recommending the use of EU authorised crop protection products and respecting MRLs, thus complying with the European Union regulations requirements.

The residue trials carried out have received the approval of the DG SANCO, the local ACP regulation authority as well as that of the main pesticide manufacturers with whom PIP has signed a partnership agreement. PIP is taking in charge the field trials and the residue monitoring, while the manufacturers prepare the Import Tolerance

request dossiers and further on, when relevant, the registration request dossiers. Import Tolerance application files prepared must include the approval certificate issued by the country where the pesticide is used on a given crop - a certificate which unfortunately does not always exist, therefore, PIP has undertaken, through its capacity Building component a programme for the update of the ACP regulatory authorities structures that should be leading, in the future, to an African harmonisation of the registration procedures.

71 active substances were tested in ACP countries, with, presently, 123 couples "plant protection product/crop"; all trials were replicated, either on 1 or on 2 sites in the same ACP country. The residues were measured in European accredited laboratories, and residue levels from this screening programme were compared with existing European harmonised or national MRLs. At the end of the first set of field trials, about 30 MRLs will require an IT setting (see Table 1).

Table 1: Number of active ingredients applied on ACP crops where IT are required

Crops	ACP country (field trials)	Number of a.s. tested	Number of a.s. with MRLs exceeded
Mango	Senegal, Mali	19	10*
French Beans	Senegal, Kenya	44	11
Okra	Ivory Coast	26	8
Pineapples	Ivory Coast	3	1**

\* : 2 fungicides applied in post-harvest

\*\* : ethephon

A registration certificate must be added to the submission dossier but, as already mentioned, many pesticides manufacturers are still reluctant in starting a registration procedure for a minor or very minor crop. Although less trials are required for setting an MRL, the procedure cost remains substantial. Moreover, many ACP countries do not respect intellectual property and data protection. Thus manufacturers will never take risks by making submissions which would open the door to generic pesticides producers. Therefore, the PIP will support the pesticide manufacturers for the submission of the Import Tolerance dossiers. Nevertheless a submission dossier will not have to be submitted systematically if the MRL is exceeded ; in some cases, an increase of the PHI (or any other modification of the local GAPs) can bring the residue level below the MRL.



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