

The inspection quality assurance: present situation and needs

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Opinion

Inspections started in the seventies as being voluntary and having the goal to help farmers to spray better and more efficiently. After some success in this missionary work in several countries, inspections of sprayers in use became mandatory to help agriculture to safeguard the use of crop protection products in their production process to optimize yield, minimize/reduce the use of chemicals and to prevent high residues in the marketed products.

Mandatory inspections have started in the 90's in European countries. The European Commission has captured that idea and integrated it as one of the actions in the European Directive 2009/128, establishing a framework for Community action to achieve the sustainable use of pesticides. In the directive a transition period has been foreseen but all sprayers on European territory should have had a 1st inspection before end of 2016.

Today, as being active in about all European member states, we observe, regardless statistics handed to the Spise secretariat, that not half of all member states has an inspection system installed. Even worse is that countries that have started an inspection system/schedule, are having issues to organise a practical follow-up of inspections in the field. This lack of supervision is causing multiple irregularities in the field, each reinforcing the other.

- **Lack of checking on farms/in the field if sprayers are inspected** (with no penalty applied to growers that are not inspected as required by law) causing farmers not to inspect their sprayer or all of their sprayers, especially smaller farmers or farmers in a secondary occupation, causing a too low number of sprayers available for inspections to make it viable for inspection stations.
- The lack of numbers of sprayers to inspect is putting an economical pressure on inspection stations that reduce the inspection cost in an economic struggle to be able to amortise their inspection tools and make no losses. **The lack of supervision on the activities of inspection stations**, not performing inspections as prescribed to reduce time and efforts, to reduce costs, to be able to lower the price of the inspection service to be the best on the market, going that far to just selling an approval certificate/sticker of inspections, causing the good and faithful growers to loose their trust in the inspection systems and seeing it just as a tax, just choosing the cheapest solution.
- **The lack of practical and precision of inspection stations**, where inspection stations use not validated/certified measuring tools in inspections and in many cases tools that are less precise (at the best identical) than the tools and parts installed on sprayers, where farmers loose trust in the results of the inspections after being rejected or require repair.
- **The lack of proper training and advisory stations for inspectors**, where inspectors have a major experience in inspections and trainers never did any inspection. This is especially an issue in completion and refreshment courses.

Is it all bad? No, but it becomes time that serious actions are undertaken in multiple countries and regions to avoid that more inspections systems that just have been initiated will implode. Nobody gains anything with bad executed inspections or even the vanishing of inspections, with the whole agricultural sector and the environment as being first effected. Let's all work together to get the process of inspections of sprayers in use back on the right track to help agriculture and environment to sustain hand-in-hand.

References

Directive 2009/128/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 October 2009 establishing a framework for Community action to achieve the sustainable use of pesticides. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2009/128/2009-11-25>