

20 EU countries continue to sell banned pesticide additive



A tractor spreads pesticide near Prenzlau, Germany | Sean Gallup/Getty Images

While legal, the move raises questions about how countries balance corporate interests against health priorities.

By [SIMON MARKS](#) AND [GIULIA PARAVICINI](#)

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Twenty countries in Europe have allowed pesticide manufacturers to continue selling glyphosate-based products containing a banned substance that the EU says has the potential to cause cancer and disturb human hormonal systems.

Although it is legal to grant grace periods of up to 18 months for banned substances in the EU, the decision by a majority of member countries to authorize sales of POE-tallowamine raises questions about the willingness of national authorities to put commercial interests of pesticide manufacturers above public health concerns.

Italy's health ministry has come under particular fire for allowing continued sales of glyphosate-based products containing a co-formulant called POE-tallowamine, which was [outlawed for use](#) in the EU in August last year. Tallowamine is a type of “surface-acting agent,” which helps pesticides stick more easily to weed leaves, instead of running into the soil.

According to Elvira Cecere, from the Italian health ministry's food safety and nutrition department, other EU countries — including France, Spain, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Estonia and Malta — have granted extended grace periods for “similar plant protection products” to be sold inside the EU.

Cecere said in an email that the move was allowed under provisions of the EU's pesticide law designed to give companies time to sell their remaining stock of a banned substance.

Enrico Brivio, spokesman for the European Commission, put the total number of countries at 20.

Environmentalists' main bone of contention with Italy stems from [a decree dated November 21](#) allowing manufacturers to continue selling the specific mixture until as late as May 22.

Writing on behalf of Pesticide Action Network Italy and Safe Food Advocacy Europe (SAFE), Michela Velardo, a member of the Rome and Brussels Bar, said she had found “[several irregularities](#)” contained in the government's decree and that the bill should be “withdrawn with immediate effect.”

No parks or playgrounds

Giuseppe Ruocco, director for the safety and regulation of plant protection products at Italy's health ministry, defended Rome's position. He said that while glyphosate products containing tallowamine have been banned in the country under a decree dated August 9, health authorities had granted companies a grace period in order to sell off their stocks.

Ruocco, who drafted and signed the decree, also said Italian authorities have made a non-binding recommendation not to use glyphosate products in public parks, gardens, sports, recreation grounds, school grounds and children's playgrounds a legal obligation.

Asked about Italy's stance, the Commission said the decision to grant a grace period following the withdrawal of a pesticide authorization "is in the responsibility of member states." The spokesperson said, "We obviously cannot comment on the possibility of infringement procedures."

Health concerns surrounding tallowamine date back to 2014 when the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) was asked by the Commission to identify missing information deemed necessary to evaluate the safety of the substance.

The following year EFSA released its findings and said that it could not guarantee its safety due to a lack of data submitted on so-called "reference values" for acceptable exposure levels for "operators, workers, bystanders, residents and consumers."

Floriana Cimmarusti, secretary-general of SAFE, said the sale of products containing tallowamine "should be immediately terminated due to their serious effects on human health."

She also said that "the extension of the grace period is unlawful and contrary to superior EU norms," citing a gap in the bloc's pesticides law concerning grace periods for substances found to be dangerous to humans.

The derogation for the sale of glyphosate products containing tallowamine applies to a host of companies including Rotam Agrochemical Europe limited, Nufarm Italia and Monsanto.

Monsanto, however, said it no longer sells tallowamine co-formulants in the EU. As recently as August last year, it said that tallowamine-based products [pose no imminent risk for human health](#) when used according to instructions.

Authors:

[Simon Marks](#) and [Giulia Paravicini](#)