

SAFE opposes deregulation of fertilisers from animal and plant effluents due to insufficient data

SAFE Food Advocacy Europe warns against plans by the European Commission to soften the rules on nitrogen-based fertiliser use, especially of fertilisers coming from livestock and plant effluents, given the persistently high nitrogen concentration in groundwater across the EU and the additional danger posed by nano- and microplastic contamination.

SAFE will raise these risks at the meeting of ESFA's 35th Emerging Risk Stakeholder Group in Granada, today and tomorrow, stressing the lack of sufficient data to properly assess the risks prior to the intended deregulation.

Deputy Director Luigi Tozzi said: “Available data show that the average nitrate concentration in EU groundwater did not change significantly between 2007 and 2023. This means that measures to protect drinking water and food production are insufficient and need to be strengthened, not weakened, contrary to the Commission’s plans. Furthermore, the primary acute health effect of nitrate concentration, known as cyanosis or ‘blue baby syndrome’, potentially life-threatening, is not subject to systematic monitoring at EU level. This is a dangerous policy gap.”

In SAFE's view, the lack of data on the dangers of microplastics is an additional concern, because no harmonised data from the monitoring of groundwater in the member states exist at this point and the first harmonised data will only be available after 2028. This makes it impossible to assess the hazards posed by microplastics in organic recycling manures and in groundwater, such as eutrophication.

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The Commission's plan is to expand the maximum usage limit for these fertilisers in so-called Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (NVZ), currently set at 170 kg of nitrogen per hectare per year.

SAFE believes that the best way to strengthen Europe's food sovereignty is to advance sustainable food production through sustained financial support, rather than loosening environmental protections.