

## **TOPPS stakeholder farm visit 22/9/2017 – key points and conclusions from moderated discussion**

All participants were invited to put forward any points or questions they had during a moderated discussion session at the end of the farm visit from 15.00-15.45.

TOPPS Chair Volker Laabs moderated the session, and it was agreed that an overview of the points raised would be added as a conclusions section to the event materials (presentations) which would be uploaded on the TOPPS website. It was also noted that the points would be summarized, as the main purpose is to gather ideas or points which could be further developed in the future.

Participants were asked to consider three questions in the discussion:

1. How to boost uptake of Best Practices for water protection in the EU?
2. How to optimize dissemination and trainings of Best Practices
3. How to select measures and to best incentivize uptake of Best Practices?

*Key points, roughly in the order in which they were raised:*

- Farmers are already faced with a lot of training and other requirements calling on their time, so how can BMP recommendations best be integrated with existing/ official trainings?
- Engagement and involvement of farmer associations, competent authorities, universities in developing and giving trainings is important.
- The number of training days varies between Member States, and whether the content of training reflects BMPs is up to competent authorities to decide.
- Training is one thing, but implementation is another – how best to make the leap from training and awareness to action?
- While the water industry is willing to support trainings, helping to build the water protection tool box and implementing other relevant measures in a transitional phase, there would be concerns about getting tied into long term subsidies for farming best practices and equipment.
- The importance of highly localized monitoring was noted as part of the process of showing specific farmers in specific areas that it is important for them to take responsibility for local measures.
- The need to demonstrate to farmers the benefits of BMPs for them personally was stressed – i.e. the benefits for their health, economic savings through better targeting of applications meaning less product going off target, etc.
- The message that correct measures when applying products helps ensure their future availability was noted as important.

- Some skepticism was nevertheless noted on the part of farmers that they might make considerable efforts and investment in best practices aimed at maintaining compounds, and then the compounds might well anyway be prohibited or restricted.
- Continuing need to build awareness of the importance and relative simplicity of managing point sources was noted.
- For incentivizing best practices and in particular equipment upgrades, it was noted that many stakeholders could play a role here, including pesticide producers.
- While the importance of incentivisation and encouragement for uptake of best practices was agreed by all, it was noted that this must go hand in hand with suitable monitoring and controls, as without proper checking it is hard to see how significant progress will be made or measured.
- Those involved in direct contacts with farmers at catchment level note that many farmers find the whole area of pesticide registration, authorization and changing rules complex and difficult to follow.
- While incentivisation in terms of costs and equipment is one way of approaching the issue, the other side of the coin can be increased value of the agricultural product if it has been produced responsibly, providing this has been documented.
- There is a difference between the national and regional level – training depends on the regional level and plays into the productivity and quality of the training
- The quality of training is more important than the quantity of training – e.g. 3 hours of quality, relevant, targeted training is far better than two days of training that is irrelevant to the farming practices of the farmer being trained.
- The question was raised as to why it is so difficult to subsidise best practices to protect water through the CAP 2<sup>nd</sup> pillar rural development programmes (RDPs)?
- It was noted that RDP approaches are highly variable between countries and regions – proposals for renovation of farm buildings for tourism purposes would be on an equal footing with suggestions to fund BMP implementation. This can all be considered part of the “greening” or “blueing” of the CAP.
- CAP 1<sup>st</sup> pillar direct payments are also relevant (e.g. SMR on PPPs, GAECs on buffer strips and groundwater) and these are controlled under cross compliance requirements.
- However, mandatory requirements are not eligible for subsidy under 1<sup>st</sup> pillar payments, while voluntary measures are subject to a very patchy and heterogeneous approach across the EU under the 2<sup>nd</sup> pillar RDP measures.
- It was noted that it remains the case that awareness of even quite basic best practice enabling technologies (such as induction hoppers for filling purposes) remains quite low in some Member States.

- The importance of simple and straightforward trainings and demonstrations is very helpful.
- On the other hand it was noted that it is not helpful to make measures mandatory unless they are genuinely required in every situation, otherwise the risk is that measures are required which are inappropriate to many situations.
- It was noted that in the context of the Joint Water and Agriculture Task Force established by the Commission end-2016/ early 2017 there is a possibility to stimulate valuable further debate involving all relevant Commission services, and also Member State level water-agri co-operation.
- At a WFD Common Implementation Strategy Strategic Co-ordination Group meeting held in May 2017 it was noted that in discussions on a 2017 Commission Staff Working Document on agriculture and sustainable water management, Member States had been requested to provide examples or ideas of how water protection measures in agriculture could best be incentivized or funded. Feedback on this request is not yet available.
- Subsidies, training and control in the correct combination were pointed out as a general and effective approach to implement best practices.
- A final point made related to the usefulness of the TOPPS Best Management Practices in helping highlight in an easily accessible way a concept for practical and available measures which could help reach EU policy goals.