High quality fertilization

The EU’s new Regulation on Fertilizing Products must maintain the quality of Europe’s fertilizers.

**THE EUROPEAN FERTILIZER INDUSTRY**

The European mineral fertilizer industry makes a significant contribution to Europe’s economy and the profitability of its agri-food sector.

- **€12.5 bn** turnover
- **€1.1 bn** investment
- **120+** production sites
- **93,000** employees
- **€66.2 m** R&D 2015

**FERTILIZERS AND FOOD SECURITY**

Mineral fertilizers are an integral part of food production. Without them 50% of the world would go hungry.

- **50%**

Today, fertilizers account for 50% of global food production.

- **2 people** were fed from 1 hectare of land in 1960
- **5 people** will need to be fed from 1 hectare of land in 2025

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Fertilizing products: the big picture

Resource use - Organic and mineral fertilizers are complementary products. Farmers first use the manure or slurry they have available to meet the nutritional needs of their crops. They then employ mineral fertilizers to make good any nutrient shortfall.

Mineral fertilizers ensure optimal plant growth in areas with limited manure or slurry availability. Similarly, crops needing special nutrients rely exclusively on high quality mineral products. Manure and slurry can supply part of the nutrients needed by Europe’s agricultural sector, but there is not enough to cover the total need, especially for nitrogen fertilization.

Market reality - the quality, flexible application and ease of transport of mineral fertilizers make them by far the most important market category. Organic fertilizers such as manure or slurry are primarily used locally. Very small amounts are traded between countries because of their high water content, limited nutrient levels and variable nutrient content.

More choice for farmers - the Commission proposal, despite covering a new range of fertilizing products, should not unravel the progress made with the 2003 Regulation. It is vital that the new Regulation maintains the quality of mineral fertilizers so that farmers can continue to supplement their crops with highly targeted fertilizing products.

Defining mineral fertilizers

Mineral fertilizers need to be clearly defined to ensure that they meet farmers’ expectations. The definition must be distinct. The key is to support a sufficient level of nutrients and limit carbon content.

Mineral fertilizers contain very limited carbon of bio-origin. Lack of a clear definition for the mineral category could, however, lead to the inclusion of poor quality products with up to 7.5% organic carbon from biomaterials, raising safety concerns related to pathogens.

Only plant-available nutrients should be declared, so as not to confuse farmers and avoid potential unwanted environmental impact. In addition a minimum level of solubility needs to be set for phosphate fertilizers.

European farmers rely on mineral fertilizers for their predictable effect on crop yields and their nutrient-use efficiency.
Ensuring the availability of key products

**Phosphate fertilizers** - the Commission’s impact assessment does not take account of the “Smolders Study”, research showing that phosphate fertilizers containing 80 mg/kg P₂O₅ do not lead to cadmium accumulation in the soil. The proposal is not based on the latest science.

There would be a consequent risk of two different phosphate fertilizer markets emerging within the EU. Parallel markets for fertilizers with the CE-mark and markets for national products with less strict cadmium limits would be created. All plants, animals and humans need sufficient amounts of phosphorus to survive. At the same time, phosphate sources with low cadmium content are limited globally. A suitable balance needs to be found.

“Should the maximum level of cadmium become too strict, the price of phosphate, mainly from Russia, would increase sharply, putting pressure on the depletion of phosphorus in European soils.”

Pekka Pesonen, Secretary-General, COPA-COECA.

**Controlled release fertilizers** - controlled release fertilizers are essential in ornamental horticulture and specialty agriculture. They are used by approximately 90% of outdoor nurseries in the EU. The proposal puts forward biodegradability requirements for the coatings of these products that are impossible to meet. Because of these criteria, controlled release fertilizers would not be available as CE-marked fertilizers on the internal market, despite the fact that they have been used by growers for several decades and are currently authorized across the EU.

As there is currently no biodegradability standard for CRF coatings, time is needed to define these, develop a suitable testing method, and allow manufacturers to undertake R&D work into coatings with faster degradability. Fertilizers Europe calls for an impact assessment of the proposed measure as a first step towards sustainable standards.

Simplifying bureaucratic barriers

Manufacturers should have an effective and non-bureaucratic path to receive a CE-mark for their products. This is particularly important for producers that deliver a large number of formulas tailored to specific crop use. The mineral fertilizer industry relentlessly develops products that meet the needs of the farmer and the environment in an optimal way.

Mineral fertilizer checklist

The new Regulation on Fertilizing Products must:

- Ensure that fertilizers on the EU market demonstrate high quality and agronomic efficacy
- Guarantee that European farmers have a wide variety of products at their disposal
- Harmonize the single market and avoid creating national markets
- Promote innovation by limiting administrative barriers.

**NUTRIENT SOURCES IN EUROPE**

Trial plots at Rothamsted Research Centre, UK, demonstrate the positive effect of application of mineral fertilizers compared to other fertilizing materials.

Source: Ian Richards. NOTE: mineral fertilizers from Fertilizers Europe forecast, livestock manures calculated from estimation on the basis of animal numbers from Fertilizers Europe forecast and waste sources from Eurostat.
The circular economy

The European Commission’s Circular Economy Package aims to extend the unrestricted movement of recovered nutrients on the internal market. The actions it proposes will contribute to “closing the loop” through greater product recycling and re-use, and bring both economic and environmental benefits.

Fertilizers Europe welcomes this approach and some of its members have already embarked on phosphate recycling. However, agronomic efficacy and limits on contaminants and pathogens must be ensured so that farmers in Europe always have access to high quality products.

“In-Farm Cycle
INDUSTRIAL CYCLE
Waste

“Only 55 grams of mineral fertilizer* are needed do produce a kilogram of bread.”

Fertilizers Europe represents the majority of fertilizer producers in Europe and is recognized as the dedicated industry source of information on mineral fertilizers. The association communicates with a wide variety of institutions, legislators, stakeholders and members of the public who seek information on fertilizer technology and topics relating to today’s agricultural, environmental and economic challenges. The Fertilizers Europe website provides information on subjects of relevance to all those interested in fertilizers contribution to global food security.

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