

The Italian fertilizers sector during the COVID-19 emergency

Italy was, unfortunately, the first European country called to face the COVID-19 crisis. The first case was reported on 21st February in the north of Italy, in Lombardy and Veneto Region and containment measures were immediately taken for the towns in which the virus was discovered.

The lockdown of the entire country was established by the Italian Government in the first days of March.

The agri-food sector and all the activities linked to it – among which the fertilizers production and selling were included - were immediately recognised as fundamental and unstoppable, thanks also to Assofertilizzanti which sensitized the authorities on this issue..

This has continued even with the more restrictive measures adopted by the Government at the end of March. Still, fertilizers retailers and distributors were required to inform authorities about the continuation of their activities. Most of these measures have been extended until 3rd May to contain the spread of the virus, which had grown significantly in the north of Italy. However, due to the decline in the number of new cases and the severe economic consequences of the lockdown, some areas have started to work again after Easter holidays (the fertilizer retailers and distributors were among the sectors re-opened after 14th April).

Assofertilizzanti has immediately agreed, together with Agrofarma (the Italian crop protection Association), to publish a press release to confirm our strong willingness to closely work with farmers and all the sector's stakeholders.

Assofertilizzanti and its member companies have worked in close coordination with Federchimica, the Federation for Chemical industry, and Confindustria, the Italian industry Federation, to give all companies the necessary support to guarantee the essential productive and commercial activities.

At the beginning of the emergency situation Italy faced some transportation problems, both internally and at the borders. Internally, there were and there still are some "red areas" in which transports are forbidden and the delivery of products is slowed down significantly. Externally, transportation companies had problems due to the different rules applied in each country, especially for drivers mandatory quarantine, but the situation now has improved everywhere.

The various provisions introduced in each Italian Region may create difficulties for companies in their everyday work. For this reason, Assofertilizzanti created a specific area on its website, with all the most recent regional ordinances and their expiry date, highlighting the provisions that can have an impact on the agri-food sector. This is undoubtedly a great help not only for our companies employers, but also for farmers and retailers.

Another area in which the association has offered its support regards the situation relating the agronomic trials on field. In Italy, unfortunately, there is no shared position about the possibility for researchers and technicians to carry on their regular activities: there are no univocal criteria in the different regions, and different interpretations and behaviours are adopted by competent authorities for controls.

The Research and Development activities should be implemented only if "justified" by the impossibility of postponing the trial/assessment or reasons of necessity for all the agri-food chain.

For this purpose, Assofertilizzanti prepared a model declaration that can be adapted according to companies' needs.

Finally, the "usual" activities with authorities regarding the national and European legislations have slowed down due to the emergency. Assofertilizzanti is continuously in contact with our Ministry of Agriculture, to facilitate and carry on the urgent matters and to provide its technical contribution to the officials.