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ATTEMPTS BY FRANCE TO REDUCE PESTICIDE USE FALTERING

The French government has promised to phase out glyphosate at a quicker rate than the EU and to reduce the use of pesticides in general. The objective was reiterated by President Macron last year (*CPM October 2017*). However, despite the introduction of several national plans to reduce the volumes of agrochemical products used in the agricultural sector the results, so far, are mixed. In fact the latest reports suggest that usage is still growing. One of the cornerstones of the government's attempt to reduce pesticide use is the Dephy network which supports 30,000 organic and conventional farms in reducing pesticide use by adopting various approaches.

Minister of Agriculture and Food, Didier Guillaume, addressed the annual conference of the Dephy network in mid-November. He said: "We will soon be on the third Ecophyto plan and the use of pesticides still hasn't fallen in France. There is something there and we need to make more progress." He further emphasised the point: "We can't go on like this, making Ecophyto plans and washing our hands of them. The results were not found in product sales." The objective of the French government is to reduce the amount of pesticides used in French agriculture by 25% by 2020 compared to 2008, and by 50% by 2025. Published figures indicate that despite the first Ecophyto plan being launched in 2008, between 2014 and 2016 the use of agrochemicals increased overall by 12% in France. And in 2017, despite the adoption of a new Ecophyto plan, the use of pesticides continued to rise by a further 0.3%.

The current plan Ecophyto II +, introduced in April, includes public consultation and will also incorporate the objective of withdrawing glyphosate use in three years. Mr Guillaume stated: "We will phase out glyphosate in 2020. The decision to postpone the ban of glyphosate until 2020 was taken as a number of farmers would have been unable to carry on if the government had enforced an earlier ban." Although total usage has not declined members of the Dephy network have noted a moderate decline in the treatment frequency amongst fruit growers, even on crops which are particularly dependent on chemistry. Baptiste Labeyrie, one of the Dephy specialists, said: "Consumers want perfect fruit without insect damage which makes the arboriculture sector very dependent on phytosanitary products." The sector, which has some 160,000 hectares of orchards, has seen the use of pesticides decrease on all crops. Sometimes, this reduction has been significant, as in the case of clementines where Dephy partner farmers use 40% less pesticides compared to 2008. For other crops, such as apples, the decrease has been more modest, between 10% and 15%.
