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Quebec should pay farmers who avoid pesticides, argues the UPA

<https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1249180/pesticides-upa-memoire-quebec-mapaq-environnement>

The Union des producteurs agricoles (UPA) is asking the Quebec government to compensate farmers who make the effort to reduce their pesticide use.

One month before the parliamentary committee on pesticides, the brief that the UPA will submit to it, obtained by Radio-Canada, encourages the province to become a national and international reference in pesticide reduction.

“It is time for the government to turn the corner and invest to become a true leader in sustainable crop protection.”

- Excerpt from the UPA's brief

In order for Quebec to position itself as a world leader, the UPA is asking François Legault's government to encourage positively rather than blame, by rewarding environmental goods and services, that is, by financially supporting farmers who make efforts for the environment and health, for the benefit of society as a whole.

“Some practices deemed to reduce the risks associated with pesticide use have a negative impact on revenues. Such practices could more easily be considered if financial compensation were granted for the losses incurred.”

- Excerpt from the UPA's brief

The agricultural union regrets that there are too few human and financial resources, while societal expectations of Quebec agriculture impose requirements that go far beyond what our main competitors face.

Farmers' efforts for the environment

Quebec producers are making sacrifices to improve their practices. Some take advantage of winter to improve their knowledge or find methods and equipment abroad to improve their yields while reducing their pesticide use.

Others carry out trials on their land at the risk of losing part of their harvest.

This is the case of Jean-Bernard Van Winden, a market gardener in Saint-Cyprien-de-Napierville, Montérégie, who is testing integrated pest management with [pink flies](#).

“This new approach would require agricultural producers to maintain a high level of knowledge.”

- Excerpt from the UPA's brief

Some of them are getting together and funding research centres and teams, says the UPA.

Others protect streams adjacent to their fields by planting wide riparian buffer strips.

The development of such strips or buffer zones near sensitive areas limits the cultivable area, and therefore farm income.

“It is the agricultural producers who decide to implement these practices, at their own expense, without a program financing the additional costs or compensating them, and without distinctive labelling identifying the food produced through these good practices, which would be very informative for the consumer.”

- Excerpt from the UPA report

Such a financial compensation program could cost \$100 million per year, according to the UPA.

The Ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation (MAPAQ) did not wish to make any comments.

The government had already thought about this idea, without moving forward. A MAPAQ document dated 2005 was entitled *Rémuntribution des biens et services environnementaux: Éléments d'analyse pour le Québec*.

The UPA also advises the government to "adequately promote and support organic production".

In this regard, Quebec is ahead of the curve and already a leader in Canada. The province has 2244 organic farms and is well ahead of its 2025 target: already 85,000 hectares out of a target of 98,000. This objective could even be achieved as early as next year.

Better training and education of farmers

In its brief, the UPA writes that producers must be recognized, trained, accompanied, empowered and supported.

She suggested increasing funding for research centres and improving the provision of neutral advisory services. In Quebec, the majority of agronomists who advise farmers on the use of pesticides are employees of the companies that sell these products.

The UPA also recommends that producers be required to undergo mandatory training, two days a year, prior to the examination in order to have the right to renew the certificate for pesticide application.

Other recommendations from the UPA's brief:

- re-hire agronomists at MAPAQ to restore the expertise lost over the past 15 years;
- that MAPAQ be reengaged in the governance of research centres;
- force the Order of Agronomists to enforce its Code of Ethics;
- review the current pesticide prescription process;
- make it easier to buy seeds that are not treated with neonicotinoid insecticides ("bee killers");
- pesticide retailers report all their sales and not just those of the most dangerous products.