

EU uses pesticide residue norms as trade barrier on agri imports

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Agriculture think-tank, CENTEGRO wants the Govt to move the WTO against EU

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File Photo: A farmer sprays pesticide on his farming land. | Photo Credit: PICHUMANI K

The Centre for Environment and Agriculture, a not-for-profit organisation focused on improving farm economy, has claimed that the European Union has put trade barriers on agriculture imports by setting stiff quality standards.

In a letter addressed to Piyush Goyal, Union Commerce and Industry Minister to move the WTO against EU, S Ganesan, Executive Director, CENTEGRO said the pesticide maximum residual level of less than 0.01 ppm (parts per million) followed by European Union on imports is thoroughly inconsistent with the provisions of the SPAs agreement (on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures) of the World Trade Organisation.

The next meeting of the SPS committee meeting is scheduled for November 7-11.

A level of less than 0.01 ppm MRL means one gram of pesticide residue in 100 tonnes of food commodity. When tested at this level, some of the pesticides not approved by the EU would invariably show up in a few imported consignments resulting in it being rejected, said Ganesan.

The almost zero tolerance level of less than 0.01 ppm acts as a strong non-tariff barrier to agriculture imports, especially from developing countries, he added.

Without realising that the EU import tolerance of less than 0.01 ppm is inconsistent with SPS Agreement, a few countries have started following it. The latest one to join the bandwagon is the United Arab Emirates that has recently signed Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement.

Rejection of imported consignments applying impugned MRL of less than 0.01 ppm will have serious consequences on agriculture production, price, and farmers' income in India. Hence, he said the Government needs to file a complaint with WTO seeking a consultation with the EU.

Breach of set norms

Under the SPS agreement, the WTO has set out basic rules for food safety and animal and plant health standards. The agreement, which says that the SPS standards should be based on science, should be applied only to the extent of protecting human, animal, and plant life.

It also makes it clear that the standards should not be arbitrarily and or unjustifiably used to discriminate between countries where the same conditions prevail or a disguised restriction on international trade, he said.

The European Parliament and European Council were involved in setting the MRLs under the regulatory procedure whereas, in other countries, it is done by a regulatory body, he said.

The default of less than 0.01 ppm is not the risk-based assessment required by SPA agreement but is hazard-based. According to European Food Safety Authority, MRL was set for 1,300 pesticides covering 378 food products in the EU. Of this, a default MRL of less than 0.01 ppm is applied to 690 pesticides or 50 per cent of the pesticides used.

<https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/agri-business/eu-uses-pesticide-residue-norms-as-trade-barrier-on-agri-imports/article66060336.ece>