Agriculture Plastic Environment Europe

Plasticulture
Alliance for nature

Agri-plastics welcome the EU Commission Communication on EU policy framework on biobased, biodegradable and compostable plastics

APE Europe, representing plastics used in agricultural production, welcomes the European Commission's communication on biobased, biodegradable and compostable plastics. It is pleased to note that agricultural applications and their specificity and usefulness has been well identified, along with the appropriate conditions of use.

Indeed, biodegradable products used in agriculture meets specific needs and requires strict conditions for their proper application.

The biodegradation of products meeting the applicable standards is well proven for over 20 years, and is used all over Europe, with an implementation in several national agriculture policies. EN 17 033 biodegradation mimics the behaviour of biological material in the environment and occurs at the same speed than the surrounding natural material[1]. Once properly incorporated in soil, it fully biodegrades and is not subject to environmental compartment transfer, even in the case of accidental leakage into water, biodegradation reach completion[2].

The positive results collected over the years in some agriculture applications (mulch film among others) constitute a solid basis to further develop standards for other applications, providing valuable tools to help farmers improving agricultural practices. The on-field biodegradation tests results show the relevance of existing standards on biodegradation[3], suggesting that potential improvement should focus on the practical guidance for users. Demanding requirements in ecotoxicity and REACH compliance[4] in the EN 17033 standard already meets the EU demands set in the Communication and an inclusion in the EU Fertilizers regulation will allow for legally enforcing them. Similarly, EN 17033 and EN 13432 standards can offer tool to the Waste Framework Directive update to simplify the composting of agricultural waste containing compostable plastics, such as horticultural twine.

In order to reinforce proper use and end-of-life management of biodegradable plastics in agriculture, practical guidance for users has been regularly published and updated by national associations. APE Europe is working on a European review to share best practices and exchange experiences, to be published in 2023.

APE Europe

APE Europe is the professional representative body of plastics for agriculture in Europe. APE promotes their technical use and the development of National Collection Schemes for used agri-plastics across Europe, while offering an information exchange platform to its members. Our members constitute 80% of the European Market for agricultural plastic films, bale nets and twines.

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[1] Disintegration and mineralization of mulch films and leaf litter in soil M. Tosin et al. Polymer Degradation and Stability 179 (2020) 109309

[2] Analysis of the microplastic emission potential of a starch-based biodegradable plastic material Francesco Degli-Innocenti et al. Polymer Degradation and Stability 199 (2022) 109934

[3] Biomaleg research program in Brittany, France. See preliminary results in the magazine Plasticulture, French issue 2023.

[4] Certifiers of biodegradable films use a list of approved components. Products out of the list are submitted to the ecotoxicity test.

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