



Irrigants d'Europe

IRRIGANTS d'EUROPE feedback to the **Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on minimum requirements for water reuse**

Reduced water availability is already affecting EU agriculture, reducing its competitiveness in the Mediterranean, and progressively in other water scarce regions in Europe. The Internal Market is equally affected by agricultural water scarcity, which introduces changes in trade flows and affects the synergies between food industries and the surrounding territories. An integrated and participated water management approach, including water conservation and water efficiency measures, needs to rely on urban treated wastewater reuse, that can provide a reliable alternative water source for agricultural irrigation. Nevertheless, public acceptance for its application in irrigation is rather low when public health and/or the environment are perceived to be at risk. Therefore, developing consumers' trust on the quality of reused water is a key enabling factor for public acceptance and for its large-scale reuse in agriculture and landscape. Treated wastewater could be used in the first place to restore and enhance natural habitats, maintaining minimum ecological flows of natural water bodies, which may contribute to allocating adequate water availability for irrigation while enhancing biodiversity. The appropriate use of treated wastewater depends on its quality and, therefore, on the received treatment. Ensure safe water reuse, requires appropriate water quality standards according to the specific use, but also ensuring adequate and reliable operation of water reuse systems and appropriate regulatory enforcement. As a result, water reuse schemes may have very different characteristics depending on the water source, its intended use, the quality standards established for each use and the appropriate treatment level to achieve these quality standards in an effective, cost-efficient way. Water reuse can affect soil productivity and thus the sustainability of land use for agriculture. Heavy metals, boron, and other toxic constituents, as well as salt accumulation in the root zone may have harmful medium to long-term impacts on crop yield, while pathogens can cause the rejection of agricultural products, the contamination of the food chain, and farmers exposure to health risks. Good water reuse practices should consider both the risks and the opportunities for farmers and for the whole food chain, identifying additional treatments to minimize risks. The protection of human health and the environment should therefore be undertaken in the context of a risk management approach, like that used by private food retailer organizations ("farm to fork" certification). Hence, the general objective of contributing to alleviating water scarcity across the EU by increasing the uptake of water reuse for agricultural irrigation requires ensuring the implementation of water treatment designed for the future water uses (fit-for-purpose). The cost of these treatments cannot be charged to the irrigated agriculture sector. Setting common minimum requirements for the safe reuse of treated wastewater in agriculture is suitable for most farming operations, is expected to support agricultural productivity and profitability, and can be compatible with public perception. The main challenge is to secure large, dependable flows and volumes of "fit-for-purpose" treated wastewater at a cost that treatment plants can bear and that poses no extra costs for farmers and their water management organizations. This could be impossible to achieve without a parallel, in depth revision of the rationale behind too strict national regulations already enforced. Agricultural businesses, including SMEs operating in the water sector or providing services and technologies for agriculture, will benefit from secure access to water resources. However, the capital investments required to set up the required water storage and reuse infrastructure at the public, collective and/or private level may be quite high, and would require long-term planning and specific financial support.

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