

## European citizens vote to ban pesticides– time for EU policy makers to follow suit

Across Europe, concern is growing about the use of hazardous pesticides and the effects they are having on people and the environment. There is a growing movement in France to support pesticide free towns and cities, across the EU people have been demonstrating against the effects of pesticides on bees and pollinators and in the latest development the citizens of the Italian town of Mals (South Tyrol) have just voted overwhelmingly to ban the use of pesticides in public and private areas.

On September 5<sup>th</sup> 2014, in the small Italian alpine town of Mals, a referendum was held on banning the use of pesticides in both public and private areas. 69% of the 5113 population voted in this referendum with 75% of voters in favour of the ban. The referendum was organized following a petition signed by local citizens. Parents were worried because their children, on their way to school, had to walk alongside orchards that were regularly sprayed with hazardous pesticides. The children were simply told by the farmer to walk elsewhere. Organic farmers had their production destroyed because of pesticide drift from spraying on conventional crops. The high percentage of the town's population that voted in the referendum shows how concerned the citizens felt about the use of pesticides and the negative effects that their use could be having on their health and local environment. Neighbouring villages are following the Mals example and examining the possibility to hold such a referendum.

Koen Hertoge, an active supporter of the referendum and member of the Italian NGO Pesticide Action Network Italia said *"We are very happy with the result of the Mals referendum, and we are very pleased to further support the people of Mals with the implementation of the ban. All political decision-makers should recognise this sign, and start re-considering the regional as well as the European agricultural policies. The outcome of the vote will be positive for our health, our tourism and also for employment as organic agriculture provides more jobs."*

Uli Veith, the Mayor of Mals was in favour of the ban from the beginning. *"As an elected mayor, I welcome the result of the referendum, and I will do everything within my power to implement the decision of the people. All (political) decision makers should recognize this unique opportunity and work together to create a concept for the future. Peripheral areas, such as Mals, should use "pesticide-free community" as an opportunity to support the development of tourism and organic agriculture, but also improve the health of the people"*.

Members of the Mals community are now communicating their story, with the hope that their example will inspire other concerned communities across the EU to follow their example.

PAN UK, PAN Germany, PAN Swiss, Générations Futures (PAN France) and PAN Europe welcome this fantastic initiative and will be supporting any similar action. European citizens deserve a toxic-free environment.

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For more information on the Mals Venosta referendum, please read PAN Italia's factsheet on the referendum:

[http://www.pan-europe.info/Resources/Briefings/Fact\\_sheet\\_mals\\_in\\_vinschgau.pdf](http://www.pan-europe.info/Resources/Briefings/Fact_sheet_mals_in_vinschgau.pdf)

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