

France spearheads grassroots movement

Activists in France take the message to markets, garden centres, farms and schools. Francois Veillerette, *Président of MDRGF*, and Elliott Cannell, *Coordinator of PAN Europe*, look back on *Semaine Sans Pesticides 2008 – a week of civil society initiatives*.

The third and biggest ever 'Semaine Sans Pesticides' ('Week Without Pesticides') took place over the last 10 days of March. The celebrations encompassed over 400 events across France and Belgium with coordinated actions in Austria, Hungary, Italy, Macedonia, Quebec, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

In France, pesticide campaigners marked the occasion by holding conferences, showing movies, holding debates, putting on exhibitions and agricultural training workshops, as well as events in garden centres, farms, markets and schools. Most events were aimed at the general public, with a few tailored towards school children or aimed at professionals using pesticides. Many initiatives worked to involve some of the people they were aiming to influence, which reinforced the message. For example, around 50 garden centres sympathetic to ecological gardening hosted debates, projections or hosted display stands on biological agriculture. Most of them committed to selling biological control products.

In Paris, an exhibition described alternative treatments of household insect pests; a debate took place on the french blog site *Terredarmoise artemisia*; in the Vendée

Département, Pays de la Loire, North-west France, a band of clowns performed an ironic piece on pesticides dangers. A high profile action drew attention to the catastrophic impact of pesticides on French groundwater resources as activists in two regions of France climbed water towers and dropped banners which read: 'Save Water!' (see box).

The first ever *Semaine Sans Pesticides* was held in March 2006 and involved around 90 events aimed at raising greater public awareness of the health and environmental impacts of hazardous pesticides and demonstrating viable alternatives to toxic agrochemicals. This annual event is organised by Citizens' Actions for Pesticides Alternatives (ACAP) – a civil society network initiated by MDRGF (Mouvement pour le Droit et le Respect des Générations Futures). Since its birth the movement has grown considerably. ACAP now includes some 170 individuals and organisations, such as Friends of the Earth, CPIE (the environment initiation centers), LPO (a conservation organization working to protect the birds and their habitats), organic and rural farmings movements and communities (AMAP, FNAB, GRAB Confédération Paysanne), non-professional gardeners (Jardiniers de France), and the

French activists highlight pesticide threat to water



'Preservons l'eau'

Photo: MDRGF

Semaine sans Pesticides 2008 was launched in Paris at the Pavillon de l'eau (headquarters of the water distribution company) with representatives from ACAP, journalists and the chairwoman of the water distribution company in attendance. On the eve of the launch high profile actions took place drawing attention to the threat to water from pesticides. The Committee responsible for the Léguer water basin dropped a banner reading 'Save water!' from the water tower in St Laurent de Bégard, Cotes d'Armor, Brittany. The following day, in the South of France, activists walked from the St Cyprien water tower to downtown Toulouse. This second action was coordinated by CAPAT, a network of citizens' involved in promoting alternatives to pesticides in the Toulouse region. The actions received extensive local media coverage of the actions, including newspapers, radio and TV broadcasts, and press conferences were held on both occasions.



Children enjoy activities at an event in La Rochelle
Photo: MDRGF



Clowns question new 'intelligent' pesticides

Photo: MDRGF



Activists walk from the St Cyprien water tower to downtown Toulouse
Photo: MDRGF

national beekeepers movement (Union Nationale des Apiculteurs Français).

Activities organised as part of *Semaine sans Pesticides* directly engage many thousands of French citizens on the issue of pesticide use, while local, national and international media coverage of affiliated actions reach out to a wider audience still. The event has grown substantially each year and has generated increasing interest from other countries.

www.semaine-sans-pesticides.com

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