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EU bets on digital transparency with biggest crop protection label reform in decade

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The European Union has unveiled a sweeping overhaul of labeling requirements for crop protection products, setting the stage for a more digital, transparent and sustainability-focused regulatory framework across the agricultural sector.

The European Commission has adopted Regulation (EU) 2026/1123, replacing the long-standing Regulation (EU) No. 547/2011. The new rules will begin taking effect from January 1, 2028, with a phased rollout of digital labeling requirements culminating in full implementation by 2030.

At the heart of the reform is the introduction of mandatory digital labeling, requiring plant protection products to feature QR codes or equivalent digital links that provide users with free access to updated product information. The move is expected to modernize how farmers, distributors and regulators access critical product data, while allowing manufacturers to update information without relabeling physical packaging.

The regulation also strengthens alignment with the EUâ??s Classification, Labelling and Packaging (CLP) framework, aiming to improve consistency in hazard communication and provide clearer safety guidance for users. Officials say the revised system introduces a more structured, risk-based approach to conveying handling instructions, disposal requirements and risk-mitigation measures.

Environmental protection has emerged as a central pillar of the new framework. The regulation introduces a dedicated bee hazard pictogram, standardized disposal instructions, and mandatory sensitization warnings for microorganism-based products. New labeling categories covering treated seeds and environmental safeguards are also intended to improve awareness of ecological risks associated with pesticide use.

Beyond safety and sustainability, the reforms seek to support the EUâ??s broader push toward precision agriculture. Labels will now reference Integrated Pest Management (IPM) principles and consider precision application technologies, encouraging more targeted and efficient use of crop protection products.

The regulation further tightens oversight of parallel trade products, introducing enhanced identification and traceability requirements designed to combat fraud and strengthen market surveillance across supply chains.

Industry stakeholdersâ??including manufacturers, distributors and authorization holdersâ??will now face a multi-year transition period to update compliance systems and labeling practices. Once fully operational, the new regime is expected to fundamentally reshape how crop protection product information is communicated throughout the European agricultural market, blending traditional labeling with real-time digital access to safety, environmental and usage data.