



THE SPANISH GOLF INDUSTRY SHOWS ITS REJECTION OF THE NEW EUROPEAN REGULATION OF PHYTOSANITAIRES

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in Southern Europe*

Once the draft of the European regulation on the sustainable use of plant protection products has been approved, the main entities in the golf sector - **Royal Spanish Golf Federation (RFEG)**, **Spanish Association of Golf Courses (AECG)**, **Spanish Association of GreenKeepers (AEDG)** and **Association of Golf Professionals (PGA.E)** - show their rejection of it, as well as the **prohibition of the use of Chemical Phytosanitary Products**, exposing the following arguments.

Sports grass and especially Golf courses constitute their **own ecosystems**, providing a stable and calm habitat for plants and animals. In these environments, other organisms, such as insects, fungi or parasites that can become pests for people (pine processionary, for example) or for the grass (fungal diseases, insect pests, nematodes or weeds). To maintain these spaces in **balance that any ecosystem requires**, the Golf Courses and their technicians apply a wide range of tools **of Pest Control**.

This Pest Control includes all the cultural tasks carried out on the Golf Courses (reaping, fertilization, irrigation...) and seeks to manage strong grass and habitats so that potential pests do not exceed the established tolerance thresholds.

However, sometimes, and as occurs with other pathogens at the human level, imbalances or threats occur that normal work and the adjustments made to them are not enough, having to appeal to **biological control tools, bio stimulants and last to phytosanitary control**.

The use of these substances as the ultimate choice is legislated at the European level through [Directiva 2.009/128/CE](#) and at the national level through its transposition by [Real Decreto 1.311/2.012 sobre el Uso Sostenible de Fitosanitarios](#). This **legislation is very restrictive** in our country (together with the Netherlands, the most restrictive in Europe) and **requires careful control of the products** that are applied, where are applied and why, and the entire operation must also be supervised by a specialized Advisor in Phytosanitary (ROPO Advisor).

For 2030, the goal of reducing the use of phytosanitary products, the European Union has drawn up a [propuesta de Reglamento \(2.021/2.115\)](#) applicable to all areas (agriculture, vivarium, forests, etc.) in which the sports grounds as "Sensitive Areas" and in them **the use of Chemical Phytosanitary Products is expressly prohibited**, as well as those of biological origin, even those of low risk.

This prohibition would **make it impossible for golf courses to exist in southern Europe**, due to climatic differences with the rest of the countries, the greater threat of pests, the lack of winter dormancy, etc. at the same time affecting other sports such as professional football, horse riding, croquet, etc. The grass would be filled with annual weeds, impossible to control, that would be lost at the beginning of winter and summer, causing a lack of coverage and the progressive loss of the grass. Nematodes, insects and, above all, fungal diseases would be uncontrollable and in the majority, making it impossible to commercialize the facilities, as well as holding professional tests in them.

THE PLAYABILITY OF THE GOLF COURSES

From the point of view of the practice of the sport of golf, the application of this regulation clearly shows the effects that this would have on the facilities, since the impossibility of a restricted use of phytosanitary products would generate many problems in the playability of the courses: they would generate areas that would lose density and will be ground, the bounce of the ball would fill with mud and on the green a homogeneous rolling would not be achieved.

The technicality of the practice of this sport and the level of demand of the national and international players themselves, has led Spanish golf courses, regardless their business model, to superior maintenance that makes the destination of Spain differentiates itself from the rest due to its high added value and the excellence of its courses. The application of the regulation would mean an irreparable loss in the image of the destination.

THE GOLF INDUSTRY IN SPAIN AS A TOURISM BOOST

The golf sector would be seriously affected, putting at risk an industry that is presented as a tourist driving for Spain as the world's leading destination according to the Study [“EL GOLF COMO CATALIZADOR DE LA ACTIVIDAD ECONÓMICA”](#) develop by the Instituto de Empresa University in collaboration with the Spanish Association of Golf Courses and the Royal Spanish Golf Federation.

According to this document, tourism attracts 1,195,000 foreign tourists a year. 98.6% of them come from Europe. Comparing this figure with the 4.2 million registered golf players in Europe shows both Spain's leadership in golf tourism and its growth potential.

These tourists spend, excluding golf courses expenses, around 4,640 million euros per year in Spain. This direct spending has a multiplier effect on indirect and induced income that raises the impact of tourism spending on the Spanish economy to 11,183 million euros. The peak activity of golf tourism is not at the same time with the peak of summer tourism, so this helps to ensure that tourism in Spain will be even all around the year making it more sustainable.

The golf tourist who visits Spain is a different type of the average tourist by having a longer stay. The average number of golf tourists is around 11.9 days versus 7.4 days for the other type of tourist.

The income level of the golf tourist is significantly higher than the income level of the average tourist. While only 8.82% of the average tourist in Spain declares themselves to be high income, this percentage rises to 26.67% in the case of golf tourism.

Together, high and medium-high income tourism represents 63% of golf tourism and only 36% of average tourism in Spain.

In general, the golf sector has a direct impact on the economy of around 5,418 million euros per year, (777 million in turnover from golf courses and 4,640 million in spending by golf tourists), which rises to 12,769 (1,585 million from the courses and 11,183 million from golf tourist spending) if we take into account the indirect and induced effects.

The companies that manage the golf courses keep a very small part of all the value they generate. As an example, for an 18-hole playing right in high season that has an average price of 90 euros, golf clubs make a profit of 5.8 euros. In fact, we estimate that 57.3% of the companies that manage golf courses are not profitable.

In terms of employment, directly, indirectly or induced, **the golf sector generates 121,393 jobs per year**. The employment directly generated by golf can be considered of higher quality than the average employment in Spain. 95.5% of the employees by the companies that manage the golf courses are permanent contracts and 94.1% are full-time jobs. As a fact, in Spain, according to the INE (National Institute of Employment), only 73.2% of employment is with a permanent employment contract and 85% full-time.

Although the majority of tourism stays in hotels, the golf tourist is more loyal because they are more likely to stay in their own homes than the average tourist in Spain. While the golf tourist has a 23.7% probability of staying in a second residence, for the average Spanish tourist this probability is only 5%.

In 2018, foreign golf tourists owned around 283,000 homes and the total value of the golf tourist's real estate was around 42,000 million euros. This important real estate investment produced a recurring annual expense and a more faithful tourist to the Spain destination with a greater probability of repeating a visit each year.