



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

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Iain Stewart MP
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20 April 2022

Dear Iain,

Thank you for your email of 21 March on behalf of your constituents about an emergency authorisation for the limited use of a neonicotinoid seed treatment on the 2022 sugar beet crop.

Protecting bees and other pollinators is a priority for this Government and helping them to survive and thrive will be crucial to meeting our target to halt the decline in species abundance by 2030. The Government continues to support these restrictions and has no intention of reversing them. What we have done, is to grant an emergency authorisation for the limited and controlled use of a neonicotinoid seed treatment on one crop, sugar beet, for one year. This decision was not taken lightly.

The decision taken to grant the emergency authorisation was informed by assessments and advice from the Health and Safety Executive, the UK Expert Committee on Pesticides and Defra's Chief Scientific Adviser. Having considered their comments and analysis in full, the Secretary of State decided to grant the emergency authorisation in order to provide emergency protection against viruses which have significantly impacted yields of the sugar beet crop in previous years, while the beet industry develops alternative solutions.

Emerging sugar beet seedlings and young plants are vulnerable to feeding by aphids, which transmit several viruses, known collectively as Yellowing Virus (YV), which lead to reduced beet size, lower sugar content and higher impurities. Overall sugar beet yield can be reduced by up to 50%. Neonicotinoid seed treatments provide emerging beet crops with highly effective protection. Without the seed treatments, crops are vulnerable. In 2020, aphid levels were at their highest since the 1970s, leading to sugar beet yield losses of 24%.

The emergency authorisation includes strict conditions which are designed to minimise the potential risks to bees and other pollinators. These include a reduced application rate; prohibition on any flowering crop being planted within 32 months of treated sugar beet and a strict threshold for use. This threshold dictates that the product can only be used if predicted level of virus incidence is at or above 19% of the national crop, according to independent modelling. Following a relatively mild winter, modelling on 1 March 2022 predicted a level of virus incidence that means the required threshold for use has been met and the seed treatment can now proceed under strict conditions.

The EU restricted three neonicotinoid pesticides, including thiamethoxam, in 2018 due to evidence of their harm to pollinators. The UK supported this move. Emergency authorisations of pesticides are used by countries across Europe. Twelve EU countries including Belgium, Denmark and Spain have granted emergency authorisations for neonicotinoid seed treatments since 2018. The UK's approach to the use of emergency authorisations has not changed as a result of the UK's exit from the EU.

The sugar beet industry is developing alternative approaches to the management of YV, including breeding YV resistant strains of sugar beet through traditional and potential gene editing routes. Those alternatives are of crucial importance. That is why the Government is incentivising sustainable approaches to pest management. For example, it is planning to include Integrated Pest Management as a standard within the Sustainable Farming Incentive in 2023. Through this scheme, the Government will pay farmers to produce public goods, including biodiversity and animal health and welfare.

The Government is committed to taking action to improve the state of our bees and other pollinating insects. The Pollinator Strategy is a 10-year plan which sets out how Government, conservation groups, farmers, beekeepers and researchers can work together to improve the status of pollinating insect species in England. The National Action Plan on Sustainable Pesticide Use, to be published later this year, will also set out measures to minimise the risks and impacts of pesticides to human health and the environment, while ensuring pests and pesticide resistance are managed effectively.

For further information on the decision, please see Defra's statement here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/neonicotinoid-product-as-seed-treatment-for-sugar-beet-emergency-authorisation-application>

Yours sincerely,



VICTORIA PRENTIS MP