



Pesticide newsletter

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Regulatory news



United Kingdom: Neonicotinoids remain banned

The United Kingdom [is reversing its decision of last January](#) to authorize the use of the neonicotinoid insecticide thiamethoxam for sugar beet cultivation. The British government gave in to pressure from the National Farmers' Union and the British Sugar group. They argued that it was necessary to counter the proliferation of the yellowing virus transmitted by aphids on sugar beet fields. This decision had caused a stir among groups involved in pollinators protection and many other members of British civil society. However, it was framed by strict requirements, allowing the use of this insecticide only if the winter weather conditions proved favorable to aphids.

A threshold of at least 9% aphid proliferation on the whole beet crop had to be reached to trigger the authorization of thiamethoxam. However, due to the particularly cold weather at the end of the winter, the predictions were that aphid-borne yellowing will only affect about 8% of the beet fields. As a result, the UK government has indicated that there will be no waiver of the neonicotinoid ban this year.

This decision is in stark contrast to the [derogation](#) from the use of 3 neonicotinoids granted by the French government to beet growers, which was validated by the [Constitutional Council](#), the [Council of State](#) and [two administrative courts](#), following numerous legal challenges. However, it has been proved that on this side of the Channel, the cold episodes of this late winter have also considerably reduced the risks of aphid infestation.

Environmental groups, such as The Wildlife Trust, welcome this regulatory measure, but warn against the continued authorization of these substances in emergency situations. If next year the 9% infestation threshold is reached by the models, beet growers could then apply these neonicotinoids on their plots, whose deleterious effects on the environment are well known.

The European Union has banned since 2018 the use of most neonicotinoids outdoors to protect pollinators. This measure had received the official support of the United Kingdom, then in the midst of negotiations to leave the EU. Nevertheless, ten Member States allowed the use of these products in case of emergency. The decision not to use them this year should not lower our guard. The decree on their possible authorization in case of emergency still stands and could, in the future, represent a serious danger to the survival of pollinators, which are necessary for our food system.

For a more detailed information on the legal proceedings around neonicotinoids, see the Justice Pesticides file "[Neonicotinoids in courts](#)" of March 2021.

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