



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

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Chair
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Dear Jyoti,

Thank you for your letter of 18 March on behalf of the farmers that the Landworkers' Alliance represents. I apologise for the delay in responding. Defra is currently dealing with high volumes of correspondence.

We appreciate your concern about the use of neonicotinoids in sugar beet. Defra's approach to the regulation of pesticides is underpinned by the precautionary principle. That is why, for example, we supported a ban on the use of certain neonicotinoids to treat crops (including sugar beet) in 2018 and removed the general authorisation for their use. Given what the current science tells us about these pesticides, they can only be authorised for use in very specific circumstances where strict regulatory requirements are met, including when there is a threat of serious risk to a crop that cannot be addressed by other means.

As you note, in the case of the emergency authorisation this year for Cruiser SB (containing thiamethoxam) on sugar beet, precautions were built in to minimise the risks to the environment. One of these was that the product could only be used if the pest pressure was predicted to pass a certain threshold. Ultimately, the threshold for usage was not met and so the neonicotinoid could not be used.

The Government recently consulted on the revised National Action Plan for the Sustainable Use of Pesticides (NAP). It puts forward our proposals for increasing the uptake of integrated pest management and sustainable crop protection, in line with the 25 Year Environment Plan. A summary of responses will be issued by this summer and the final NAP will be published later this year.

With reference to your concerns about the UK sugar market, the UK currently consumes more sugar than it produces, resulting in a sugar deficit, so it is important for competitiveness and food security that we have a diverse supply, but it must comply with our food safety and compositional standards. We will support the UK sugar beet sector in pursuing alternative options including organic farming, should they wish to do so. We already work alongside the UK Organic Control Bodies to monitor and support organic production's contribution to public goods such as the environment.

We believe that the best way to build a sustainable industry is a farmer-led approach where individual producers choose what crops to produce and whether to convert to organic production. We are aware that other countries have used more direct measures to stimulate specific sectors, and we have concluded that such measures do not provide for a cost-effective long-term development of the industry.

We currently partner with other agri-environmental farming bodies, such as Linking Environment and Farming (LEAF) and Championing Farmed Environment (CFE), who promote measures such as integrated pest management that give benefits to not just organic farms but conventional farms as well. We believe that it is most effective when training and information come from trusted organisations and peer farmers rather than central government.

As the UK is no longer a member of the European Union we now have a tremendous opportunity to set our own path regarding organics and other agri-environmental policy measures. As part of that we will continue to consider new ways to support the sector and welcome any feedback and suggestions from the industry.



RT HON GEORGE EUSTICE MP