

Emergency pesticide authorisation approved to protect sugar beet if specific conditions are met

Defra has today [approved an emergency temporary authorisation](#) for the use of a neonicotinoid pesticide treatment on the 2022 sugar beet crop due to the risk to the crop from yellows viruses.

Emerging sugar beet seedlings are vulnerable to predation by aphids which have the potential to spread beet yellows virus. Sugar beet crops have been severely affected, with 2020 yields down by a quarter on previous years. Other pesticide and organic treatments are not sufficiently effective in controlling viruses.

63% of the UK's sugar comes from domestic production of sugar beet which could be at risk if a significant amount of the national crop is infected. The strictly time limited emergency authorisation of this neonicotinoid treatment – Syngenta's Cruiser SB – will provide emergency protection against this virus, which could significantly impact yields of the sugar beet crop while the beet industry develops alternative solutions. Its exceptional temporary use will be tightly controlled and only permitted in very specific circumstances when strict requirements are met.

The maximum amount of treatment approved for use is 6% of the quantity of active substance applied on a range of crops in 2016 before neonicotinoids were prohibited.

Conditions of the authorisation include reduced application rate as well as a prohibition on any flowering crop being planted in the same field where the product has been used within 32 months of a treated sugar beet crop.

There will be an initial threshold for use, meaning that seed treatment will only be used if the predicted level of virus is at or above 19% of the national crop according to independent modelling. If the virus threshold is not met then the neonicotinoid treated seed will not be used – as was the case at the start of 2021 when this step was last taken.

12 EU countries – with significant sugar production – including France, Belgium, Denmark and Spain have granted emergency authorisations in the last three years for neonicotinoid seed treatments following the EU-wide ban – backed by the UK – coming into force.

The UK's approach to the use of emergency authorisations has not changed as a result of the UK's exit from the EU, and is in line with the approach taken across Europe. The UK's work to harness advancements in scientific research including through gene editing will also help to develop crops that are more resistant to aphids and other pests.

A Defra spokesperson said:

This decision has not been taken lightly and is based on robust scientific assessment. We evaluate the risks very carefully and only grant temporary emergency authorisations for restricted pesticides in special circumstances when strict requirements are met.

Last year the threshold was not met so the authorisation was never exercised. Strict criteria remain in place meaning this authorisation will only be used if necessary.