

Wildlife & Countryside Link – dynamic alignment with EU pesticide standards

This note summarises the benefits of aligning with EU pesticide standards as part of a UK-EU SPS agreement. Please see our [recent briefing](#) setting out priorities in relation to the much wider suite of issues relevant to our coalition and in scope of the SPS.

The prospective UK-EU SPS agreement offers significant benefits to the UK's environment and economy. Comprehensive dynamic alignment on EU pesticides standards (including EU decisions on active ingredients, Maximum Residue Levels permitted in food and conditions of use) is needed to bring GB regulation back into higher EU levels of protection, that should set a regulatory baseline – and not a ceiling - for environmental ambition. This will carry significant economic benefits in removing [costly](#) barriers to trade that would be delayed by overextended transition times. It will also start the process towards significant reductions of pesticides in line with [government targets](#), which place considerable economic costs on society from their impact on soil, water, wildlife and health.

Since exiting the EU, pesticide standards in Great Britain have weakened and fallen behind the EU, which has risked higher levels of more toxic chemicals that are harmful to health in food, as well as the use of more toxic pesticides and with fewer conditions on their use harming our wildlife and waterways. During this period, the Health & Safety Executive has extended approvals for 14 pesticide active substances that have since been banned in the [EU due to their harmfulness, and weakened hundreds of safety limits for pesticide residues allowed in food](#). The EU also has more stringent conditions on pesticide use and has since banned the use of glyphosate as a pre-harvest desiccant, which continues to be widely used for this purpose in GB. This reduces post-harvest drying but leads to significant levels of glyphosate residue in wheat and flour, which are potentially toxic and carcinogenic, the reason why this practice is banned in the EU. In addition, the EU requirement for [digital recording of pesticides use](#) which currently applies to Northern Ireland should be extended to the rest of the UK as part of this process, that would monitor delivery of the government's pesticide reduction target. In terms of potential risks or drawbacks, EU pesticide standards are currently under threat from a [Food & Feed Safety Omnibus package](#) of proposals, and EU rules should provide a regulatory baseline and not a ceiling for UK protections. The agreement should allow the same scope for the UK to go ahead of and take more ambitious action on pesticides, as member states such [as Denmark](#) have done, for example in banning some PFAS active substances used in pesticides.

Earlier this year pesticides lobby group CropLife UK [released a report](#) claiming that moving quickly to align with EU pesticide standards could cost British farmers up to £810 million from reduced yields. The report looked at matching the EU bans on 14 active ingredients, as well as 4 active ingredients recently approved in GB that are waiting on approval in the EU. Greenpeace has set out [detailed analysis](#) of these 14 pesticides banned in the EU, that are linked to cancer, reduced fertility and groundwater pollution, to which further delays will prolong harmful exposure. It is also increasingly recognised that the widespread use of pesticides is in fact seriously threatening future food security, from their harmful impacts on [soil health and populations of beneficial wildlife essential to food production](#) (from

pollinators to earthworms), to the development of [pesticide resistance](#). Pesticide use is also associated with further costs to society, including the costs of remediating [contaminated soils and water bodies](#) and adverse impacts [on human health](#). Inflated claims about the costs of regulation in the past (for example, that there could be a [100% drop in yield of carrots](#) from new pesticide laws) that have been used to delay protections, have been subsequently proved unfounded. The costs of transition are considerably outweighed by the economic benefits of a deal to the majority of farmers of restoring access to their largest export market and safeguarding supply chains.

CropLife [has called on the government](#) to deliver a “managed approach to alignment, and reject any scenario that does not respect legitimately made GB decisions”. Martin Lines, Chief Executive of the Nature Friendly Farming Network and arable farmer and contractor in East Anglia, has acknowledged that EU alignment would bring some significant challenges “particularly for arable farmers” and has instead said there should be a 12-month transition period for cereal farmers. This would need clarity this summer, to ensure the following autumn and 2027 spring cropping decisions are able to take account of the new rules and align with them if new rules start from summer 2027. For non-organic OSR growers, that are more dependent on glyphosate as a desiccant currently, NFFN has suggested a transition period of up to 2 years is likely needed, to enable the market for new farming kit to respond.

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