

Tackling pesticide-related harms to protect the environment and human health

Ahead of this year's general election, each political party should commit to a major reduction in pesticide-related harms to human health and the environment, including a reduction in use. This document sets out our priorities.

The Pesticide Collaboration – hosted by PAN UK and the RSPB – is a coalition of environmental and health groups, academics, farming networks, trade unions and consumer rights organisations working under a shared vision to urgently reduce pesticide-related harms in the UK. Together, these groups represent more than 9 million members of the public and manage over 2 million acres of land in the UK.

We are calling for the next government to:

1. Introduce ambitious pesticide reduction targets for both usage and toxicity
2. Commit to a phase-out of pesticide use in urban areas
3. Commit to ending repeated emergency derogations of unauthorised pesticides
4. Increase support for farmers to adopt agroecological farming practices
5. Incorporate pesticide reduction into climate and nature policies



1. Introduce ambitious pesticide reduction targets for both usage and toxicity

The UK has committed to “reducing the overall risk from pesticides and highly hazardous chemicals by at least half” in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework agreed at COP15. This should now be reflected in domestic policy.

Setting measurable targets (including proper monitoring) makes it easier to quantify how pesticide reduction can contribute towards other legally binding targets, such as the species abundance target and net-zero. Setting a clear direction of travel is important to drive innovation, focus attention on safer and more sustainable alternatives, and to provide reassurance to farmers and other pesticide users that they will receive support to enable them to contribute towards meeting reduction targets.

Including a measure of toxicity to humans and wildlife will ensure that the pesticides known to be most directly harmful are reduced first and fastest. But cutting overall use is also needed to ensure that indirect and poorly understood effects from pesticides are reduced.

The Pesticide Collaboration has commissioned [a detailed report](#) on what pesticide reduction targets should look like.



2. Commit to a phase out of pesticide use in urban areas

The phase out of urban and amenity use of pesticides is essential. With the dual aims of reducing human exposure to toxic chemicals and protecting wildlife including aquatic species, many towns and cities around the UK and globally have already ended pesticide use in urban areas. Most urban pesticide use is purely for cosmetic reasons, and there are plenty of non-chemical alternatives available.

The most commonly used pesticide by local authorities is glyphosate. In March 2015, the UN World Health Organisation declared glyphosate to be a ‘probable carcinogen’ for humans, meaning that repeated or long-term exposure is linked to cancer, **including Breast Cancer**, and glyphosate is increasingly being linked to **Parkinson’s**.

Over 100 local authorities across the UK have now gone pesticide-free or have taken significant reduction measures. Introducing a ban on urban use, as France did in 2019, would be a clear recognition of the harmful impacts of pesticides on human health, as well as on the local environment.

Our draft Private Members’ Bill – drafted by The Pesticide Collaboration, ClientEarth and Wildlife and Countryside Link – sets out what legislation in this area could look like ([link to follow](#)).

While pesticide use in urban areas constitutes approximately 10% of the UK’s total usage, it is the second most common route through which people are exposed to pesticides: committing to a phase-out is a tangible action that will support biodiversity in our towns and cities while also protecting human health.

3. Commit to ending repeated emergency derogations of unauthorised pesticides

In January 2021, 2022, 2023 and now again in 2024, the government permitted the ‘emergency’ use of the banned pesticide thiamethoxam – a type of neonicotinoid. These pesticides are lethal to wildlife – a single teaspoon of neonicotinoid is enough to deliver a lethal dose to 1.25 billion bees. The Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU) declared that providing emergency derogations for expressly prohibited neonicotinoid-treated seeds is not in line with EU law – the UK should follow this example in adopting an outright ban on neonicotinoids.

The UK should set out a path to end the repeated 'emergency' derogations of unauthorised pesticides such as neonicotinoids. The emergency authorisation process was not designed for repeated year-on-year authorisations like we're seeing. To bring an end to the current misuse of the derogations system, the next government must also commit to funding research into alternatives for all pesticides that are granted emergency derogations, including the use of neonicotinoids such as thiamethoxam on sugar beet crops.

4. Increase support for farmers to adopt agroecological farming practices

The uptake of genuine, improved Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and agroecological farming must be accelerated. IPM is an approach to managing pests, diseases or weeds under which chemical pesticides are used only as a last resort, if at all. It is a core part of agroecology, which seeks to understand and work with nature to grow food sustainably.

The next government should build on the work around the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) in England. Good progress has been made when it comes to the Sustainable Farming Initiative, for example including payments for farmers to not use insecticides, creating habitat for beneficial wildlife and payments for producing an IPM plan. It is important that the government supports farmers to incorporate all aspects of IPM in order to achieve significant and genuine pesticide reduction.

However, ELMS has become a pick'n'mix situation, whereby (for example) a farmer could be paid public money for simply writing an IPM plan without doing any of the practical actions that actually reduce pesticide use. There is now an opportunity to improve the scheme to ensure that ELMS, and the developing agri-environment schemes across Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, deliver for farmers as well as the environment. Farming policies and schemes should recognise the major role that organic farming can play in supporting pesticide reduction: these should help **increase organic farming to 10% of the UK's agricultural area**.

The next government must also identify whether existing policies and legislation for agricultural weed control - such as the Injurious Weeds Act - remain fit for purpose and are coherent with an ambition to significantly reduce pesticide use.

As well as publicly funded agri-environment schemes, it is also vital to provide farmers with the independent advice, peer-to-peer learning opportunities and training that is needed to shift from high input farming to an agroecological approach, including increasing uptake of IPM.

5. Incorporate pesticide reduction into climate and biodiversity policy

The next government must recognise that climate, nature and agriculture are all intrinsically linked. Pesticide use is often falsely presented as a climate mitigation strategy by the agro-chemical industry, which perpetuates the myth that intensifying food production through the continuous use of harmful chemicals is the only way to guarantee global food security while protecting precious habitats.

Unless we change our approach, **the impacts of the climate emergency are expected to lead to an increase in pesticide use**, which will create a vicious cycle between chemical dependency and worsening climate breakdown. As temperatures rise, the amount of pests increase and crop resilience goes down, requiring ever-larger amounts of pesticides. This rise in pesticide use will cause insects and weeds to develop resistance to herbicides and insecticides in greater numbers, while also continuing to harm human health and the environment.

Therefore, it is essential that pesticide reduction is incorporated into all nature and climate policies.

By adopting agroecological farming methods, including genuinely improved Integrated Pest Management (IPM), agriculture can play a key role in climate change mitigation and adaptation. The government has committed to the legally binding target of net-zero emissions by 2050. One third of greenhouse gas emissions come from the food system and, of this total, two-thirds are as a result of agriculture.

Whoever forms the next government must therefore recognise that the UK's net-zero target, as well as the target to halt the decline in nature by 2030, cannot be achieved without transforming agriculture, which must include a major reduction in pesticide use.

For hyperlinks and references please visit pesticidecollaboration.org/general-election/

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