

**‘GREEN FOCUS: Why are pesticides bad news for bees and what can we do?’**

*By Dixie Darch, Taunton Green Parents*

**ENVIRONMENTALISTS have reacted with alarm to the UK government’s authorisation to use the neonicotinoid thiamethoxam on sugar beet crops in the east of England.**

So what are the facts?

According to Professor Dave Goulson at Sussex University, even minute amounts of neonicotinoids impair bee navigation, reduce egg laying and learning and suppress the immune system.

In a study on bumble bees, six parts per billion resulted in an 85% drop in the number of new queens produced in each nest.

Seed dressing allows the chemicals to accumulate in the soil, where it can be absorbed by the roots of other plants, or leach into waterways harming invertebrates.

This pesticide has now been banned within the EU, but is allowed for emergency use.

British Sugar and the NFU have applied for the authorisation because sugar beet crops in 2020 have suffered significantly from a virus called yellows disease, which is spread by aphids.

The controls to mitigate ecological damage include limits on the application rate and a ban on flowering crops in the same field within 22 months.

Sugar beet does not flower and flowering weeds will be treated with herbicide to deter pollinators. It is not intended as a long-term solution.

Should we lobby against this decision? In my view, yes.

Why? Because the sugar beet emergency is eclipsed by the ecological emergency of insect loss, with a third of wild bee and hoverfly species in decline in the UK.

A third of our food is dependent on pollinators. A recent study on UK apple production showed growers are losing about £6 million in income because of a shortage of pollinators: using neonicotinoids and weedkiller is a short-term solution which will make a long-term ecological and economic problem much worse.

The Wildlife Trust, Friends of the Earth and several other groups have petitions you can sign, as well as writing to your MP.