

# France adopted the complete ban on acetamiprid – the last of the group of neonicotinoids authorised in the EU

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*French President Macron has signed a law that definitively bans the reintroduction of the pesticide acetamiprid, blamed for the mass mortality among bees, France 24 reports. The active substance acetamiprid weakens the immune system of bees and disrupts their reproduction, but it is also harmful to other beneficial species. At the same time, French farmers are facing the serious challenge of protecting their crops from the increasing number of pests in recent years, during which the EU has pursued a policy of reducing pesticide use.*

The law was published in the government's Official Journal on 12.08 (Tuesday), after the Constitutional Council, the country's highest court, annulled the contested provision for the reintroduction of acetamiprid. The court stated that insecticides known as neonicotinoids pose "risks to human health" and are unconstitutional because they infringe the right to life in a balanced and healthy environment, guaranteed in the country's Environmental Charter.

Critics of the bill, adopted in July by the lower house of parliament, claim that it was rushed through without sufficient debate. Initially, the government intended to restore the use of the pesticide to help farmers control the ever-increasing number of pests, but more than two million people in France signed a petition against it, tipping the scales in favour of supporters of the law to abolish the chemical substance. The main farmers' trade union opposed the court's decision and once again called for its review in the name of fair competition with their European counterparts, since in other EU countries the insecticide is legally applied, albeit under certain conditions.

### **It is called the „bee killer“, but it is also dangerous for other insects**

Acetamiprid is a synthetic insecticide developed in the 1980s and used in agriculture since the 1990s, particularly in field crops such as oilseed rape and potatoes, orchards, viticulture and floriculture. Like all neonicotinoids, it affects the nervous system of insects. Pollinating insects are not only poisoned, but many of them also suffer long-term damage, such as impaired orientation and reproduction. Acetamiprid is both a contact and systemic insecticide, which means that the chemical spreads through plant tissue and is also ingested by herbivorous insects that are in fact not pests.

Consumer protection organizations have long been calling for a complete ban on the insecticide, whose approval in the EU was extended until 2033. Contamination of fruit and vegetables with the pesticide has increased more than threefold in recent years, and spraying has increased even further after the ban on other neonicotinoids, according to data from the non-governmental organization Foodwatch 2023. According to the study, residues were found in 2.1% of all tested food samples in 2012 and in 7.4% in 2021. Sweet cherries, courgettes, aubergines, spinach and peppers, along with pome fruits (apples, pears), stone fruits (apricots, cherries, peaches), grapes, berries, tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers and lettuce, were frequently contaminated.

Numerous scientific studies have been conducted on the environmental and health effects of the use of the chemical substance. A recent study by the University of Hohenheim in Stuttgart found that acetamiprid is more than 11,000 times more toxic to certain insects than indicated by the prescribed sensitivity tests, for example on honey bees. A series of field, greenhouse and laboratory experiments analysed the effects of acetamiprid on

various plant bugs. They are widespread and, in addition to damaging vegetable and fruit crops, they are also a source of food for birds and invertebrates.

### **Why farmers in France do not agree with the decision of the Constitutional Council**

France is the largest producer of sugar beet in the EU, and the crop is increasingly affected by viral diseases transmitted by aphids, which are vectors of various economically important diseases.

In practice, since 2018 French producers have not been allowed to use acetamiprid, which is used against aphids in sugar beet and is also a good alternative to pyrethroids, which are at high risk of resistance development.

Acetamiprid is part of the plant protection programmes of other European Union (EU) countries, and its supporters argue that French farmers need it to help them compete with their European counterparts.

At the same time, in countries such as Germany, where the production of sugar and fodder beet is also significant, Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009 is currently being applied on an emergency basis, allowing farmers to use the insecticide for up to 120 days. From the spring of 2024, farmers there can use the plant protection product also in oilseed rape and potatoes, and fruit growers can use it in apple production.

The situation in France demonstrates the complex challenges of pesticide regulation, where the interests of farmers, environmentalists and scientists collide. The debate surrounding acetamiprid shows that the decision to approve pesticides often depends on a careful balancing of economic interests with risks to health and the environment.