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Co-op bans eight pesticides after worldwide beehive collapse

First UK supermarket chain – and Britain's biggest farmer – to prohibit chemicals implicated in the death of over one-third of British bees

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A bee collects nectar from a flower in a garden in Pontevedra. Photograph: Miguel Vidal/Reuters

The Co-op today became the first UK supermarket to ban the use of a group of pesticides implicated in billions of honeybee deaths worldwide.

It is prohibiting suppliers of its own-brand fresh produce from using eight pesticides that have been connected to honeybee colony collapse disorder and are already restricted in some parts of Europe.

The Co-op said it will eliminate the usage of the neonicotinoid family of chemicals where possible and until they are shown to be safe. The Co-op has over 70,000 acres of land under cultivation in England and Scotland, making it the largest farmer in the UK. Since 2001, it has already prohibited the use of 98 pesticides under its pesticide policy.

Simon Press, senior technical manager at the Co-op group said: "We believe that the recent losses in bee populations need definitive action, and as a result are temporarily prohibiting the eight neonicotinoid pesticides until we have evidence that refutes their involvement in the decline."

Laboratory tests suggest that one of the banned chemicals, imidacloprid, can impede honeybees' sophisticated communication and navigation systems. It has been banned in France for a decade as a seed dressing on sunflowers. Italy, Slovenia and Germany banned neonicotinoids last year after the loss of millions of honeybees. And the European Parliament voted earlier this month for tougher controls on bee-toxic chemicals.

Paul Monaghan, the Co-op's head of social goals accused the UK government of failing to recognise that "pesticides could be a contributing factor" in the breakdown of nature's number one pollinating machine.

Elliott Carnell, coordinator of Pesticide Action Network (Pan) Europe, said he hoped the Co-op's pioneering stance would persuade the UK government to back the proposed European legislation. "The government has fought against any attempts to protect bees, which pollinate a third of the average diet. It argues that banning pesticides jeopardises crop yields, but if that was the case why would a leading food retailer be introducing this

measure?"

The pesticide ban is part of the [Co-op's 10-point Plan Bee](#) launched today, which includes £150,000 for research into the impact of pesticides on the decline of honeybees in England, where more than a third of hives were wiped out last year. It will also give away bee-friendly wildflower seeds to Co-op members and customers.

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