

Voluntary Report – Voluntary - Public Distribution

Date: November 24,2020

Report Number: BE2020-0020

Report Name: Belgium Extends Neonicotinoid Use on Sugar Beet Seed for 2021

Country: Belgium

Post: Brussels USEU

Report Category: Agricultural Situation, Policy and Program Announcements, Sugar, Sanitary/Phytosanitary/Food Safety, Pest/Disease Occurrences

Prepared By: Yvan Polet and Tania DeBelder

Approved By: Lisa Allen

Report Highlights:

For the third year in a row since the European ban on use of neonicotinoids from 2018, Belgium will grant a derogation for sugar beet. Belgian beet growers applaud this decision, as they fear the impact of beet yellowing virus, which provoked major yield losses in France in 2020. However, many beet farmers forgo the use of neonicotinoid treated beet seeds because of the attached major restrictions on following crops, which significantly disrupt the farm crop rotation management.

On November 17, 2020, Belgian Agricultural Minister David Clarinval approved the derogation (in French) from the 2018 European ban on the use of neonicotinoids for the use of imidacloprid in seed dressings for sugar beet seed in 2021. The derogation will allow farmers to plant beet seeds treated with imidacloprid from February 15 through June 14, 2021. This is the third year that Belgian authorities granted a derogation for sugar beet seed since the EU ban was installed. The European Commission is not expected to refuse the Belgian notification of this new limited derogation.

The Belgian Beet Growers Association (CBB) applauds this measure as it will allow beet growers to effectively combat beet yellowing, the presence of which has been growing since the ban on neonicotinoids and caused severe yield damages in France¹ during the 2020 beet growing year. However, it remains to be seen to what extent Belgian beet growers will use this possibility given the severe restrictions that are attached for following crops² (in Dutch). Belgian rules dictate that no flowering crops are allowed in the two years following neonicotinoid seed use, including potatoes, corn and flax, but also most cover crops, which are mandatory under the Common Agricultural Policy's (CAP) conditionality measures. The culture of rapeseed is even forbidden for five years. Because these crops all mandate larger acreages than sugar beet, the use of the neonicotinoid derogation was only used in 25-30 percent of beet fields in the first year of derogation and decreased to 10-15 percent in the second derogation year 2020. Because of the uncertainty about farmer uptake, beet seed companies are hesitant about proposing seeds with neonicotinoids, resulting in only one company offering this option in 2020. Even if frequently and easily observed in beet fields during 2020, the impact of yields of beet yellowing in Belgium is less severe than in France, but the virus attack is spreading from year to year.

Background on Neonicotinoids

The EU prohibited the use of three neonicotinoids (clothianidin, imidacloprid, and thiamethoxam) everywhere except greenhouses in April 2018 and banned a fourth one (thiacloprid) in January 2020. It means that the EU has banned four out of five neonicotinoid pesticides (chemically comparable to nicotine), which were previously licensed in Europe. The Commission based its assessment on findings of the European Food Safety Agency (EFSA), which highlighted concerns about the active substance being toxic for humans. EFSA could not conclude that the risk to bees was low because of gaps in the available data. Further data gaps meant the agency could not be certain of what risk the substance posed to consumers if it leached into drinking water, to birds and mammals, aquatic organisms and non-target plants.

¹https://apps.fas.usda.gov/newgainapi/api/Report/DownloadReportByFileName?fileName=France%27s%20Sugar%20Beet%20Crop%20Devastated%20by%20Disease%20-%20Sugar%20Industry%27s%20Viability%20Threatened_Paris_France_08-11-2020

²https://fytoweb.be/sites/default/files/legislation/attachments/gaucht_70ws_120_dagen_toelating_beets_2020.pdf

Although, the use of the active substances is no longer authorized at EU level, MS can still grant emergency authorizations according to article 53 of Regulation (EU) 1107/2009. Under special circumstances, Member States may allow the placing on the market of such a PPP containing an unauthorized active substance for a maximum period of 120 days and for limited and controlled use, in case such a measure is needed to control a serious danger that cannot be controlled by any other reasonable means.

Related reports from FAS/EU:

Country	Title	Date
EU	EU Sugar Semi-annual 2020	10/05/2020
France	France's Sugar Beet Crop Devastated by Disease - Sugar Industry's Viability Threatened	08/12/2020
EU	European Union: Sugar Annual 2020	05/04/2020
EU	Implications of Restricted Use for Neonics in the EU	05/08/2018

The GAIN Reports can be downloaded from the following FAS website: <https://gain.fas.usda.gov/#/>

Attachments:

No Attachments.