



By Fred Searle

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Farmers' unions call for glyphosate renewal

UK unions urge EU to renew glyphosate's licence for maximum period of 15 years as debate over its health risks continues

The UK's farming unions have sent a letter to the European Commission calling for glyphosate's licence to be renewed for the maximum period of 15 years.

The letter, signed by the respective presidents of the English, Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish farmers' unions, was sent ahead of an EU standing committee meeting, scheduled for 9 November, on whether to reauthorise the controversial chemical, which is the active ingredient in Monsanto's popular Roundup weedkiller.

Environmentalists and health campaigners are pushing for a flat ban amid concerns that it may cause a type of blood cancer called non-Hodgkin Lymphoma, while Britain's national farmers' unions, along with the EU's Copa-Cogeca, want a full 15-year extension.

In 2015 a paper in the Lancet Oncology journal classified the chemical as

"probably carcinogenic to humans". But in March this year the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and the European Chemicals Agency published their own study, concluding that the chemical was safe to use – a report that, according to leading US toxicologist Christopher Portier, [plays down the chemical's cancer risk](#).

In their letter to the Commission, the National Farmers Union, NFU Cymru, the National Farmers Union of Scotland and the Ulster Farmers' Union complain that the prolonged decision on whether to reauthorise the chemical has "eroded confidence and certainty in the regulatory system". They call for "a return to evidence-led policymaking that is insulated from political bargaining and based on fair scientific risk assessment."

"European farmers need glyphosate to provide a safe, secure and affordable food supply," the letter continues. "Glyphosate is subject to regulation, as

with all other pesticides, so that it is only present within safe levels in the food chain."

The unions also argue that the chemical is "an essential tool for farmers and allows conservation agriculture to take place".

"Farmers use cover crops between commercial crops to improve soil structure and drainage, as well as reduce soil erosion," they say. "Without access to glyphosate, it would not be viable to plant these biodiverse rich cover crops as part of a farming rotation."

In October EU nations postponed a vote on whether to ban the continued use of glyphosate, whose current 18-month licence expires at the end of the year.

Members of the European Commission decided not to vote on extending the chemical's licence after the European Parliament had backed a decision to limit its renewal to five years.



Glyphosate is the active ingredient in Monsanto's Roundup weedkiller Photo: Mike Mozart/Flickr

The EU's executive Commission had earlier proposed a license extension of ten years.

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