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## EU deal on new pesticide controls

The EU is moving towards stricter controls on pesticides after European Parliament negotiators reached a deal with the 27 EU member states.

The legislation will ban 22 chemicals that can trigger cancer or cause neural, hormonal or genetic damage.

The full parliament is expected to vote on the package in January, then it goes to EU leaders for final approval.

Crop scientists and pesticide firms say the controls may create new pest resistance problems and reduce yields.

If adopted, the legislation will let member states license pesticides at national level or through mutual recognition. The new rules are meant to replace the EU's 1991 pesticides legislation.

The EU is to be divided into three zones - north, centre and south - with compulsory mutual recognition within each zone as the basic rule. Currently pesticide approvals are handled by each individual country.

Individual countries will still be able to ban a pesticide because of specific environmental or agricultural circumstances.

### Environmental 'milestone'

The Green MEP steering the legislation through parliament, Hiltrud Breyer, said the agreement reached late on Wednesday was "a milestone for the environment, health and consumer protection in Europe".

"The EU will set a global precedent by phasing out highly toxic pesticides," she said.

UK farmers have warned that the new controls will lead to higher prices, making cultivation of crops such as broccoli, cauliflower, carrots and onions uncompetitive in the UK.

A leading UK plant scientist, Professor John Lucas at Rothamsted Research, voiced concern that "we will not be able to replace the substances banned at the speed policy makers believe".

"The industry is only able to launch about five new active ingredients per year," he said.

The legislation also envisages:

- A three-year deadline for replacing products containing hazardous substances, if safer alternatives exist
- Approval for up to five years for a substance needed to tackle a serious danger to plant health, even if that substance does not meet the new safety criteria



UK farmers fear the new rules will make crops more expensive



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- A general ban on aerial crop spraying - exceptions will require approval by the authorities
- Buffer zones to protect aquatic environments and drinking water from pesticides
- A ban or minimum pesticide use in public areas such as parks, sports grounds, schools and hospitals.

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The new legislation is planned to supersede existing EU law only gradually. Pesticides sold currently will remain available until their existing authorisation expires, to prevent any large-scale withdrawal of products from the market.

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