

Good Neighbour Initiative

Why do farmers use pesticides?

Pesticides are used to protect crops from weeds, pests and diseases which might otherwise reduce their yield and quality. Farmers use a range of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) approaches to keep their use of pesticides to a minimum, such as rotating crops around the farm, using pest or disease resistant varieties of crop, and planting crops at times of the year when pest pressure is lower.

Can you use any pesticides on a farm?

Pesticides are highly regulated and monitored and can only be sold or applied in the UK if the Health and Safety Executive has authorised their use on the crop concerned and the ways they can be used. This highly regulated system ensures there are no unacceptable risks to the public, the people using the products, or the environment. In addition, there is a Code of Practice that provides detailed advice on using pesticides safely and in line with legal obligations.

Who advises on which pesticides to use? Is he or she qualified?

Pesticides are very expensive so they are only used when necessary. Qualified professional advisers, called agronomists, are used to identify which weeds, pests and diseases need to be controlled, when and how. Agronomists need to hold a certificate of competence from BASIS, the professional body for agronomists. This involves undergoing training and passing an exam. Agronomists also undergo Continual Professional Development each year to be included on a professional register.

Do farmers have to share spray records with members of the public?

No, but discussion with interested members of the public about what has been sprayed is always the best option. By law, farmers have to keep accurate records of all spray applications. These records are inspected every year by independent farm assurance scheme inspectors and are open for inspection by the Health and Safety Executive.



Do farmers have to provide notification before any spraying application?

Prior notification for pesticide applications isn't currently a legal requirement. But warning residents before applying a spray is a courtesy that can enable them to take any precautions they feel necessary to try and reduce personal exposure and small amounts of drift on their property (e.g. bringing washing and pets indoors, closing windows). Discussing and agreeing the best way to notify local residents – a phone call, a letter, an email or a text – is always the best option.



How can farmers stop pesticides from drifting into gardens?

There are various ways a spray operator tries to reduce spray drift:

carefully monitoring the weather conditions, especially wind, to reduce drift

having low drift nozzles fitted to the sprayer

having a buffer zone alongside houses which is unsprayed



Are spray operators trained?

All agricultural spray operators have to undergo specialist training appropriate for the machine they operate. More than 21,000 spray operators are members of a Continual Professional Development scheme and attend training events on an annual basis.

How can farmers ensure spray equipment is safe to use?

The National Sprayer Testing Scheme operates an annual independent testing scheme for spray equipment. Farmers are encouraged to have their sprayer tested annually. As part of Red Tractor Farm Assurance, these NSTS tests are carried out annually. Regular testing is a legal requirement and safe use of equipment is a key part of the training all pesticide users are required to undergo.

