

**ALL MATERIALS EMBARGOED UNTIL 00.01 (LONDON, GMT) ON TUESDAY 30<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER:**

## **How are UK supermarkets doing on pesticides? (Media Pack)**

Information included in media pack:

- Press release (including results of 2021 ranking) – *page 1*
- Supermarket pesticide scorecard – a look at the detail of the 2021 ranking – *page 4*
- What is PAN UK asking supermarkets to do? (key recommendations) – *page 4*
- What can UK shoppers do? – *page 5*
- Results of 2019 ranking (for comparison) – *page 5*
- Methodology for 2021 supermarket ranking – *page 6*

### Press release

#### **UK supermarkets undermining global health and environment through use of highly hazardous pesticides**

A ranking launched today by Pesticide Action Network UK (PAN UK) has revealed that highly toxic pesticides are being used within the supply chains of all of the UK's largest ten supermarkets.(1) The chemicals in question include carcinogens and hormone disruptors, as well as bee-toxins and water contaminants shown to harm aquatic species.

Josie Cohen from PAN UK said “While our ranking reveals that some supermarkets are doing much better than others, we found that they could all be doing more to phase out the most dangerous pesticides. While some of these chemicals are still used in the UK, many have been banned because of their impact on human health and the environment. But they are still allowed in many other countries where our food is grown, and where they routinely poison workers and wildlife and contaminate the natural environment.”(2)



The results published today echo those of PAN UK's previous supermarket ranking in 2019, but with some key changes.<sup>(3)</sup> M&S and Waitrose continue to be 'best in class', with Co-op and Sainsbury's swapping third and fourth positions, but still close behind. Morrisons has jumped up two places since 2019 to take fifth, while both Tesco and Asda's positions remained static in sixth and eighth place respectively. Lidl, which did not respond to the survey in 2019, came in seventh. Aldi, meanwhile, tumbled from fifth to ninth, after clarifying that bee-toxic and other harmful pesticides banned by the EU do, in fact, remain in use in their supply chains (like all other UK supermarkets). Iceland dropped one position since 2019 to come in last.

Cohen added, "As a sector, supermarkets have made progress in reducing pesticide-related harms over the past two years but there is still a long way to go. Due to the global environmental crisis, more and more people are thinking about how their eating habits are impacting nature. Customers want to be sure they aren't driving serious health or environmental problems in the UK or beyond, and are increasingly deciding where to shop based on these type of concerns."<sup>(4)</sup>

PAN UK surveyed and ranked the ten supermarkets with the largest share of grocery sales against eight criteria related to pesticides, including what support they provide to their suppliers to use non-chemical alternatives. The findings highlighted the following concerns:

- UK supermarkets are not doing enough to protect bees and pollinators. While most have placed some kind of restrictions on the use of bee-toxic neonicotinoids (which have played a role in the global collapse of bee populations and have therefore been banned in the UK since 2018), they are still used in the supply chains of all ten of the UK's largest supermarkets.
- Highly Hazardous Pesticides (a concept which originates from the UN) continue to be used in all UK supermarket supply chains.<sup>(5)</sup> The list includes pesticides which are acutely toxic and can therefore cause serious harms to farmers and workers after just a single instance of exposure. It also includes pesticides which have been linked to a range of chronic diseases including cancer, birth defects and developmental disorders.
- While all supermarkets conduct residue testing on food items to check that pesticide levels don't exceed legal limits, only two supermarkets have recently started publishing this information in detail (M&S and Co-op).<sup>(6)</sup> Customers of the other eight supermarkets have no way of finding out which specific food items contain the most residues, making it impossible for them to make shopping decisions aimed at avoiding pesticides in their diets (other than choosing organic).
- Six of the top ten supermarkets (Asda, Aldi, Lidl, Morrisons, Sainsbury's and Tesco) continue to sell high-risk pesticide products (such as weedkillers), providing little or no information to customers beyond what is on the label on the potential risks to human health and the environment, or how best to avoid them. The list excludes Iceland and M&S which don't have gardening ranges. Co-op and Waitrose both took the hugely positive step of announcing an end to their sale of pesticides in 2021.
- In general, the higher-end supermarkets are doing more to reduce pesticide-related harms linked to their global supply chains. As a result, shoppers concerned about pesticides who are on lower incomes are often left with little choice but to shop at supermarkets with weaker standards.

"Most of the pesticides used in global agriculture are entirely unnecessary. There are tried and tested non-chemical alternatives which protect human health and don't trash the environment while still producing the amount of food we need", said Cohen. "If we are to have any chance of reversing the current biodiversity and public health crises, then all supermarkets need to step up and do more to prevent pesticide-related harms."

## SPOKESPERSON CONTACT:

### **Josie Cohen**

*Head of Policy and Campaigns, Pesticide Action Network UK (PAN UK)*

[josie@pan-uk.org](mailto:josie@pan-uk.org) / +44 (0)7956 250 260

### **Emma Pavans de Ceccatty**

*Campaigns and Communications Assistant, Pesticide Action Network UK (PAN UK)*

[emma@pan-uk.org](mailto:emma@pan-uk.org) / +44 (0)7554 431 341

## NOTES TO EDITOR:

- (1) PAN UK's ranking is based on survey responses from the UK's largest ten supermarkets. When possible, their survey responses are cross-checked against publicly available information. The full set of PAN UK supermarket survey questions are available upon request.
- (2) Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food, January 2017, <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/report-special-rapporteur-right-food-ahrc3448>; The global distribution of acute unintentional pesticide poisoning: estimations based on a systematic review, December 2020, <https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-020-09939-0>
- (3) PAN UK's 2019 supermarket ranking and scorecard are included in the media pack and also available upon request.
- (4) YouGov polling (November 2021) found that 40% of Britons now say that the environment is one of the top three issues facing the country, <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2021/11/09/concern-environment-reaches-record-high-yougov-top>; YouGov study 'Purpose and Ethics in Grocery' (March 2020) found that 45% of respondents claimed they look into 'ethical' issues about a company before making a purchase from it, <https://docs.cdn.yougov.com/qom80pf5zn/YouGov%20at%20The%20Grocer%20%27Purpose%27%20conference%20March2020.pdf>
- (5) The UN's World Health Organization (WHO), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and Environment Programme (UNEP) all recognise that highly hazardous pesticides (HHPs) cause adverse human health and environmental effects and support concerted action to address HHPs. More information can be found on their websites:  
[https://www.who.int/ipcs/assessment/public\\_health/pesticides/en/](https://www.who.int/ipcs/assessment/public_health/pesticides/en/)  
<http://www.fao.org/agriculture/crops/thematic-sitemap/theme/pests/code/hhp/en/>  
<http://www.saicm.org/Implementation/EmergingPolicyIssues/HighlyHazardousPesticides/tabid/5479/Default.aspx>
- (6) Co-op's residue data can be found on the company's website:  
[https://assets.ctfassets.net/bffxiku554r1/16Lv9vS10zUTWyarTABzAu/d02a2f76cd47f5fc0165eefa0558b7c7/Crop\\_protection\\_and\\_pesticides\\_data\\_report\\_2020.pdf](https://assets.ctfassets.net/bffxiku554r1/16Lv9vS10zUTWyarTABzAu/d02a2f76cd47f5fc0165eefa0558b7c7/Crop_protection_and_pesticides_data_report_2020.pdf) &  
[https://assets.ctfassets.net/bffxiku554r1/1eInvR1xjF2PdHPapTekV7/43973da066ca387329575549c04142a6/Crop\\_protection\\_and\\_pesticides\\_additional\\_data\\_2020.xlsx](https://assets.ctfassets.net/bffxiku554r1/1eInvR1xjF2PdHPapTekV7/43973da066ca387329575549c04142a6/Crop_protection_and_pesticides_additional_data_2020.xlsx); M&S' residue data can be found on the company's website:  
<https://corporate.marksandspencer.com/documents/m-and-s-residue-information-2021.pdf>

## Supermarket pesticide scorecard – a look at the detail of the 2021 ranking

Supermarket Pesticide Scorecard (2021)		PESTICIDE ACTION NETWORK UK									
	ALDI	ASDA	CO OP	Iceland	LIDL	M&S	Morrisons	Sainsbury's	TESCO	WAITROSE & PARTNERS	
Highly hazardous pesticides											
Supporting suppliers											
Residues in food											
Bees and pollinators											
Customer engagement											
Pesticide products				N/A		N/A					
Transparency											
Organic											

Lagging behind  
 Could do better  
 Making good progress  
 Outstanding  
 N/A Do not sell gardening products

### What is PAN UK asking supermarkets to do?

PAN UK is calling for UK supermarkets to implement a range of detailed recommendations aimed at reducing pesticide-related harms linked to their supply chains. As revealed by our ranking, some supermarkets are already taking many of these actions, but all could be doing more. Here are PAN UK's headline recommendations:

- Increase efforts to phase out the most hazardous pesticides (known as 'Highly Hazardous Pesticides') from their global supply chains and, wherever possible, replace them with non-chemical alternatives.
- Support their suppliers to reduce pesticide use through conducting research and training, offering bespoke advice, producing guidance documents and enabling them to come together to share learnings.
- Require their suppliers to adopt pollinator-friendly practices and monitor pollinator activity.
- End the use of pesticides known to be particularly harmful to bees and other pollinators throughout their global supply chains. This should include the four bee-toxic neonicotinoids that are banned in the UK (clothianidin, imidacloprid, thiamethoxam and thiacloprid).
- Introduce additional safety requirements designed to protect workers using pesticides known to be particularly harmful to human health.
- Immediately end the sale of all synthetic pesticide products.
- Put in place measures to reduce pesticide residues in food, including broad testing programmes and stringent action plans for tackling the most serious residue problems.
- Improve transparency around pesticides by publishing the company pesticide policy, results of their in-house residue testing schemes, and the lists of pesticides that are monitored, restricted and prohibited from use within their supply chains.

- Make more effort to proactively communicate with customers to encourage them to:
  - Buy fruit and vegetables which aren't cosmetically perfect
  - Accept that they may occasionally find a 'bug' in fresh produce
  - Accept that not all fresh produce items will be available all year round
- Boost organic sales through actions such as expanding their organic ranges and increasing marketing of organic produce.

## What can UK shoppers do?

There are a range of things that shoppers can do to encourage their supermarket to take action on pesticides. They can...

- Tell their supermarket to reduce pesticide-related harms linked to its global supply chains, and to stop selling high-risk pesticide products in its gardening and pet ranges (via PAN UK's quick online actions or in-store).
- Stop buying pesticide products (and stop using them in their gardens) so supermarkets get the message that they shouldn't sell them.
- Choose to buy the 'wonky' or most imperfect-looking fruit and vegetables, thereby reducing the need for cosmetic pesticides.
- Congratulate their supermarket if they find a bug in fresh produce. Complaints from customers about bugs are one of the factors holding supermarkets back from reducing their pesticide use.
- Buy local, seasonal produce whenever possible, thereby reducing the need for fungicides which prevent fresh produce from rotting while being transported.
- Buy organic whenever possible. Shoppers who can't afford or access a fully organic diet can find out which items to prioritise by checking PAN UK's Dirty Dozen list at <https://www.pan-uk.org/dirty-dozen/>

## Results of PAN UK's 2019 supermarket ranking (for comparison)



## What process did PAN UK go through to rank the supermarkets? A description of our methodology

PAN UK went through an extremely detailed process to produce our supermarket ranking. Below is an overview but we are very happy to answer additional questions so let us know if you want further detail, including a copy of the full survey.

### **Stage 1: Supermarkets selected**

PAN UK's 2021 survey builds on work conducted for our 2019 supermarket ranking. For this previous ranking we selected supermarkets based on their share of the UK groceries market. This gave us a list of the top ten supermarkets in order of grocery market share: Tesco, Sainsbury's, Asda, Morrisons, Aldi, Co-op, Lidl, Waitrose, Iceland, M&S. In 2021, these remain the supermarkets from which the majority of people in the UK buy their weekly groceries.

### **Stage 2: Survey sent to supermarkets**

We sent a survey to each of the ten supermarkets, with a five-week deadline to respond. The survey asked questions about eight topics related to pesticides in supermarkets' global supply chains, and included a focus on any progress made since the 2019 survey.

Listed below are the eight survey topics, plus examples of questions under each heading (the full survey is available upon request):

#### Topic 1: Phasing out the most hazardous pesticides

- Does the company have an explicit commitment in place to phase out the most hazardous pesticides (known as Highly Hazardous Pesticides or HHPs) from its supply chain?
- Does the company have lists of pesticides active substances that it prohibits, restricts or monitors throughout its supply chain?

#### Topic 2: Supporting suppliers to use non-chemical alternatives

- What support does the company provide to help suppliers, in particular farmers and growers, to reduce pesticide use in their operations?
- What form does the support offered to farmers and growers take? (for example, research, training, guidance documents, bespoke advice, enabling farmers and growers to share learnings on non-chemical alternatives with each other)

#### Topic 3: Reducing harm caused to bees and pollinators

- What is the company doing to ensure that bees and other pollinators are not harmed as a result of its supply chains?
- Are there any measures in place to ensure that the three neonicotinoids that were banned by the EU in 2018 (clothianidin, imidacloprid and thiamethoxam) are not being used to grow products in the company's global supply chain?

#### Topic 4: Monitoring and reducing pesticide residues in food

- What items does the company monitor for pesticide residues? (for example, fruit and vegetables, wheat products, rice, meat, dairy, fish)
- What action plans does the company have in place for tackling the most serious residue problems?

#### Topic 5: Being transparent about pesticides

- What information on pesticides does the company make publicly available?
- Does the company publish the results of its residue testing?
- Does the company publish lists of pesticides that have been banned from its supply chain?



#### Topic 6: Selling pesticide products

- Does the company sell pesticide products (including weed killers) for use in homes and gardens?
- Does the company provide any guidance information for members of the public on how to minimise the health and environmental risks associated to the pesticide products it sells?

#### Topic 7: Engaging with customers on reducing pesticide use

- Does the company have any measures in place to encourage consumers to:
  - Buy fruit and vegetables which aren't cosmetically perfect?
  - Accept that they may occasionally find a 'bug' in fresh produce?
  - Accept that not all fresh produce items will be available all year round?

#### Topic 8: Boosting organic sales

- Does the company have any plans to increase the amount of organic items it sells?
- Has the company undertaken any significant activities to communicate the benefits of organic to its staff or customers?

### **Stage 3: Supermarkets scored and ranked**

PAN UK received survey responses from all of the top ten supermarkets. We set about analysing and scoring the responses. Each answer was scored from low to high. A higher score was received when a supermarket was doing well compared to other supermarkets, and likewise a low score was received if a supermarket was doing comparatively badly. As this survey builds on the 2019 ranking, we also considered any progress (or lack thereof) from supermarkets compared to their previous answers.

The average score for each supermarket across the eight topics was calculated, to determine the overall hierarchy of the ranking. Given that two supermarkets (M&S and Iceland) do not have gardening ranges and therefore don't stock pesticide products, these supermarket's scores were calculated as an average of how they performed over seven topics.

### **Stage 4: Supermarkets given an Opportunity to Comment**

We sent each supermarket an outline of what we were planning to publish about them and gave them a chance to respond. We received responses from all supermarkets except for Asda. PAN UK has represented the responses we received as fairly and honestly as possible, while making them comprehensible and engaging to the public.

### **Next steps**

In 2022, PAN UK plans to continue working closely with as many supermarkets as possible to help them strengthen their pesticide policies and reduce pesticide-related harms in their supply chains.

---

For further information, please get in touch with PAN UK using the following details:

#### **Josie Cohen**

*Head of Policy and Campaigns*

[josie@pan-uk.org](mailto:josie@pan-uk.org) / +44 (0)7956 250 260

#### **Emma Pavans de Ceccatty**

*Campaigns and Communications Assistant*

[emma@pan-uk.org](mailto:emma@pan-uk.org) / +44 (0)7554 431 341