

Farmers must join forces to cut insecticides

Farmers must join forces to reduce pesticide use. Good information about the alternatives is also crucial.

Researcher Lieneke Bakker makes this case in her PhD thesis on the use of insecticides on Dutch farms. Farmers *are* willing, says Bakker. ‘They do want to cut their use of chemicals but they can’t, or at least not on their own.’

Bakker reached these conclusions after a large survey among conventional

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arable farmers in which she investigated what was preventing farmers from cutting their

use of insecticides. ‘Farmers say they don’t know enough about the possible alternatives. So there is a knowledge gap. They are also influenced a lot by what the neighbouring farmer does; they watch one another.’

Group

So collaboration is important.

That is also clear from a large field study on the use of insecticides and the number of insects along the borders of arable fields. Spraying a lot reduces the number of insects by a quarter. It doesn’t matter whether the border is next to an organically farmed field or a conventionally farmed one. Why is that? ‘The use of insecticides influences the whole area,’ explains Bakker.

So an ‘organic’ field border is also affected by the use of insecticides in the adjacent field. Bakker: ‘The choices made by individual farmers influence others too. For real change, you need to find solutions as a group.’ RK