



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government



Scottish Government  
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

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[www.gov.uk/defra](http://www.gov.uk/defra)

25 June 2025

Dear Sir/Madam,

## Stakeholder engagement for the policy review of *Helicoverpa armigera*

I am writing to seek your views on a policy review of *Helicoverpa armigera*. As a result of this review, the deregulation of *H. armigera* is being proposed.

### Background

*Helicoverpa armigera* (Lepidoptera: Noctuidae), commonly referred to as the cotton bollworm, is a pest of many important crops worldwide. This species is characterised by its global distribution, a wide host range and the exceptional dispersal abilities of adult moths. Globally the most important crops impacted by *H. armigera* are tomato, cotton, pigeon pea, chickpea, sorghum and cowpea. Although *H. armigera* has a global distribution, it has yet to become established in North America, however following introductions into South America in the 2010s and subsequent rapid expansion this is thought to be inevitable with time.

*Helicoverpa armigera* is currently listed as a quarantine pest (QP) in Great Britain and there are specific import requirements for plants for planting of *Chrysanthemum*, *Dianthus* and *Pelargonium* to prevent the introduction of the moth into the country.

The majority of interceptions of *H. armigera* are of caterpillars and occur on edible produce, such as sweetcorn, asparagus and peppers. There is a low risk of the pest completing its development on produce and then subsequently finding a suitable host to lay eggs on. The current regulatory status of *H. armigera* requires statutory action to be taken on findings of *H. armigera* in all situations including those on plant products.

In the late summer of 2024, there were two findings of *H. armigera* larvae in growing crops of *Zea mays* (maize) in England, one in Dorset and one in Worcestershire. These are believed to have hatched from eggs laid in the maize crops by a migrant adult from the continent. Outbreaks of *H. armigera* have not been reported under protection in GB for at



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least a decade. When outbreaks have occurred under protection, they have been at specialist growers of ornamentals such as *Pelargonium* and *Chrysanthemum*. No outbreaks have been detected in commercial tomato glasshouses in the UK.

## Policy review

The attached document reviews the regulatory status of *H. armigera* in Great Britain: Three options are considered:

1. Maintaining the current regulatory status as a quarantine pest
2. Regulating as a regulated non-quarantine pest
3. Deregulating *H. armigera*.

In conclusion, the deregulation of *H. armigera* is being proposed as the most appropriate next regulatory step for this pest.

We welcome your views on whether you agree to deregulate *H. armigera* as a quarantine pest. If implemented, this measure would eliminate the associated import requirements, and no statutory action would be undertaken in response to detections of this species. In addition, if you have evidence that should have been considered within this review, we would be grateful if you could submit this to us.

Any comments should be sent to [plantpestsrisks@defra.gov.uk](mailto:plantpestsrisks@defra.gov.uk) by **3 September 2025**.

Comments provided in response to this letter, including personal information, may be made available to the public on request, in accordance with the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) and the Environmental information Regulations 2004 (EIRs).

If you do not wish your response, including your name, contact details and any other personal information, to be publicly available, please say so clearly in writing when you send your comments. Please note that if your computer automatically includes a confidentiality disclaimer, this will not count as a confidentiality request. Please explain why you need to keep details confidential. We will take your reasons into account if someone asks for the information under freedom of information legislation. However, we cannot guarantee that we will always be able to keep those details confidential.

Yours faithfully,

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