

French government declares war on pesticides

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Glyphosate is the main component in the best-selling herbicide Roundup produced by the US agro-chemicals giant Monsanto, but there have been concerns it may cause cancer

France is planning to cut back on use of all pesticides, the government said Monday, though it rowed back on an announcement of an outright ban on controversial chemical glyphosate.

Government spokesman Christophe Castaner had said earlier Monday that France—Europe's biggest food producer—intended to phase out

glyphosate completely by 2022 over fears that it may cause cancer.

But he later reversed his comments, saying that by the end of President Emmanuel Macron's five-year term "the government is committed to seeing significant progress on all pesticides".

Glyphosate is the active ingredient in one of the world's most widely used weedkillers, Roundup, produced by the US agro-chemicals giant Monsanto.

The European Commission has proposed extending the licence for the use of the chemical for 10 years, which France has said it will vote against and try to block.

France's biggest farming union, the FNSEA, said Monday that it was "out of the question" for the country to go it alone, worrying that a French ban could put them at a disadvantage against European competitors.

"A sudden ban, no—a path for reducing it and finding solutions, if the solutions are good economically and technically, we can see it happening," said FNSEA chief Christiane Lambert.

Europe limited use of glyphosate last year pending further research.

The EU's chemical agency said glyphosate should not be classified as cancer-causing.

But this is challenged by scientists and environmentalists who point to a finding by the International Agency for Research on Cancer that glyphosate is "probably carcinogenic".

Some 1.3 million people have signed an online petition calling for a ban

on the chemical.

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