

#OSR Reboot: BIODIVERSITY



Reviving OSR: A Lifeline for Pollinators and Biodiversity

Imagine a spring without the buzz of bees or the vibrant hum of hoverflies. This silence is no longer hypothetical; it is becoming a creeping reality in the UK. Pollinator populations continue to decline, with the UK Biodiversity Indicator for pollinators showing a staggering 24% decrease in distribution between 1980 and 2022. The reasons for this decline are unclear but the 2013 EU ban on neonicotinoid insecticides, supposedly implemented to protect pollinators, has not prompted any recovery. The situation demands urgent action.

This decline is not happening in isolation. Agriculture plays a pivotal role, particularly in the cultivation of flowering crops such as oilseed rape (OSR). OSR flowers provide a nutrient-dense source of pollen and nectar during late spring and early summer, a critical period known as the "hunger gap" for pollinators. Without these resources, insects like bees and hoverflies face severe food shortages just as their colonies are establishing and expanding.

Recognising this, United Oilseeds launched the "OSR Reboot" initiative in the summer of 2024. Designed to revitalise OSR cultivation in the UK, the campaign addresses key challenges such as pest pressures and declining yields. By encouraging farmers to reintroduce OSR into their rotations, the initiative aims to boost biodiversity and provide essential foraging habitats for pollinators. Supported by key organisations such as the Bee Farmers Association, the OSR Reboot has the potential to create a win-win-win scenario for agriculture, the environment and the economy.

But the road to recovery is complex. Rewind to 2013, when the neonicotinoid ban was implemented without a thorough evidence base or impact assessment. Ten years later, the outcomes are clear: a drastic reduction in homegrown OSR production, continued pollinator declines, and a rise in the resistance of alternative controls that may harm beneficial insects. Disappointingly, the reduction in domestic OSR production has offshored the problem, with the UK increasingly relying on imports from countries where neonicotinoid use remains widespread. This shift not only undermines the intended environmental benefits of the ban but also contributes to a larger carbon footprint due to the transportation of imported OSR, often over long distances.

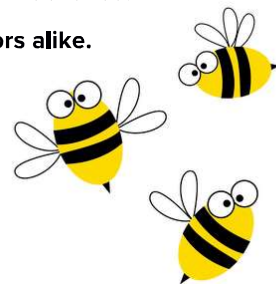
Initiatives like the OSR Reboot exemplify proactive efforts to create a pollinator-friendly landscape. One such example is the collaborative Enigma V project, which brings together industry partners to drive innovation in sustainable crop protection. By exploring advanced strategies that reduce reliance on traditional chemical solutions, this initiative not only supports resilient OSR cultivation but also enhances biodiversity and ecosystem health.

These efforts align with broader environmental objectives, including Labour's nature recovery goals. By reintroducing OSR under biodiversity-promoting conditions, these initiatives are providing meaningful steps toward restoring pollinator health and creating sustainable ecosystems.

The message is clear: reversing the decline in pollinators requires integrated strategies and collaboration across sectors. Through initiatives like the OSR Reboot and cutting-edge projects like Enigma V, we have the tools to balance productive farming with environmental stewardship.

But the Government can also do its bit by encouraging farmers to include flowering crops in the arable rotation through the SFI payment scheme, looking at the nitrogen-fertiliser restrictions on Autumn-planted OSR, and promoting knowledge transfer channels to improve the uptake of integrated pest management (IPM) tools that have already been identified.

Now is the time to act to secure a thriving future for our ecosystems, agriculture, and pollinators alike.



United Oilseeds #OSRReboot

CULTIVATING SECURITY, PROSPERITY, AND BIODIVERSITY