

Bayer, Syngenta Propose Bee Health Plan to Forestall Restrictions on Products



(*Beyond Pesticides*, April 3, 2013) Last week, Syngenta and Bayer CropScience proposed an action plan to forestall pending European Union (EU) restrictions on their neonicotinoid products that have been linked to global bee declines. Stating that a ban on their products would not save hives, the plan focuses on implementing agricultural best management practices, planting habitat, and new research and development, all of which fail to seriously address the real problem that their products are highly toxic to bees. This new industry plan comes on the heels of the European Union (EU) stalemate on bee health, and after the EU food safety agency concluded that certain neonicotinoids pose unacceptable risks to bees.

Public and regulatory scrutiny is now focused on the class of chemicals –**neonicotinoids**– linked to bee health decline. Neonicotinoids have been shown by numerous studies to adversely impact the health of bees, as well as **birds and aquatic organisms**. Beyond Pesticides, Center for Food Safety, and Pesticide Action Network North America joined beekeepers and other environmental and public health advocacy groups to **sue** the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), calling for the suspension of the neonicotinoids, clothianidin and thiamethoxam. The science continues to document these chemicals as impairing bee function, navigation and long-term health. Over in Europe, Syngenta and Bayer CropScience released a **press release** last week to “help unlock the EU stalemate on bee health.” Both companies adamantly state that their products are not the cause of recent bee declines. According to the release, “This comprehensive plan will bring valuable insights into the area of bee health, whereas a ban on neonicotinoids would simply close the door to understanding the problem. Banning these products would not save a single hive and it is time that everyone focused on addressing the real causes of declining bee populations.”

Their plan includes the planting of more flowering margins around fields to provide bee habitat and food, as well as reducing agricultural dust emissions, best management practices, and more research into the impact of parasites and viruses. Not surprisingly, the proposed plan does not address the reduction of pesticide applications to fields where bees forage, or any of the concerns about the toxicity of their products on bee health. Most of the proposed features of the plan are already mandated under European legislation and have done little to reduce impacts to bee. Furthermore, proposing to plant bee-attractive flowering fields adjacent to agricultural areas where pesticide-contaminated dust and pollen can drift for miles may only exacerbate the bee crisis.

According to the press release, Bayer and Syngenta identify parasites and viruses as the major culprit behind bee declines. However, recent studies by U.S. Department of Agriculture scientists find that low level pesticide exposures can in fact **impair the immune system** of honey bees, making them more susceptible to parasites and viruses which otherwise healthy bees can control. **Other recent published studies** conclude that the neonicotinoids, imidacloprid and clothianidin, cause cognitive damage in bees. While the bees are still alive, the lobes of the brain fail to communicate with each other with obvious implications for their survival. Beekeepers across the country have been experiencing above average honey bee losses since 2006, around the time crops treated with neonicotinoids (clothianidin) became popular.

This new statement by the industry giants comes as Europe is at a stalemate over restricting these chemicals. European member states **failed to reach an agreement** on the proposal to suspend neonicotinoid use on flowering crops over the next two years. The EU proposal followed reports released by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), which found the continued use of neonicotinoids –clothianidin, thiamethoxam and imidacloprid– to be an unacceptable “high acute risk” to pollinators, particularly honey bees. However, three EU members opposed the plan to suspend, blocking the European Commission from attaining a qualified majority to adopt the proposed suspension. The EU proposal would have suspended the use of the three neonicotinoids from use on flowering crops like corn, oil seed rape, apples, carrots, and strawberries for a period of two years, with a requirement for subsequent review.

EPA, which has federal regulatory jurisdiction over pesticides, has yet to act definitively. Recently, the agency hosted a “Pollinator Summit” which was led and overwhelmingly dominated by industry interests. The summit produced the same measures proposed by Bayer and Syngenta in their recent press release. EPA, taking industry’s lead, seems content to focus on short-term risk mitigation measures, such as reducing contaminated field dust. The agency continues to ignore acute and chronic toxicity, supported by the scientific literature, that neonicotinoids have on bees and other pollinators. EPA continues to fail to uphold its standard that pesticides must have a “no unreasonable adverse effect” on the environment.

Join us this weekend as we convene the 31st National Pesticide Forum in Albuquerque, New Mexico! New Mexican honey bee inspector, president of the New Mexico Beekeepers Association, and a beekeeper for over 30 years, Les Crowder, will address the forum on organic and natural solutions for problems commonly treated with chemicals, and the role beekeepers can play in protecting biodiversity. Join us in Albuquerque, New Mexico for a discussion on strategies that we all can take to protect pollinators!

Source: [Syngenta Press Release](#)

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