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## Bees and the Controversial Use of Neonicotinoid Pesticides (/full-blog/rivera)

Agriculture (/full-blog?category=Agriculture), Natural Resource (/full-blog?category=Natural+Resource)

By: Terra Rivera, Staff Member

The recent upsurge in mass numbers of unexplained bee deaths has stirred debate over what could be causing these incidents around the globe. Some scientists now believe that a specific class of pesticides called neonicotinoids might be to blame. Last December, the European Union enacted a two-year ban on three types of neonicotinoid pesticides in response to the European Food Safety

Authority's report that stated that neonicotinoids pose "high acute risks" to pollinators, like bees.[i] The U.S. currently has no such ban in place. However, the EPA has expressed similar apprehension over the insecticide's long-term effects, and certain U.S. cities are currently considering instituting local bans.

Neonicotinoids are a fairly new class of pesticide. Neonicotinoid pesticides target an insect's nervous system, ultimately paralyzing and killing it.[ii] Opponents of neonicotinoids say that what is so troubling about this type of water-soluble pesticide is that the residue of the pesticide accumulates in the pollen and nectar of treated plants and remains in the tissue of the plant as it grows. [iii] The bees then pollinate the plants and ingest the residue which some speculate interferes with the nervous system of bees; causing them to become disoriented and unable to find their way back to the hive, eventually resulting in death.

Proponents of the insecticide argue that this evidence is inconclusive and that neonicotinoids have no effect on the bee population.[iv] They stress that many factors contribute to bee death, such as environmental factors, pest infestations, and bee management practices. Two European manufacturers of the pesticides have brought legal action against the EU's ban in the European Court of Justice, and here in the U.S. the manufacturers of the chemicals are involved in intense



(<http://www.joycery.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/bee-pesticide.jpg>)

lobbying to ensure that no ban is enacted in this country. The manufacturers argue that this kind of pesticide is safe if used as directed and that any bee death that might have occurred is simply the result of misuse of the chemical.[v]

As tensions over these controversial insecticides continue to build and bees continue to die for unapparent reasons, a ban in the U.S. becomes more of a possibility. Last year, Oregon enacted a temporary ban on neonicotinoids after 50,000 bees died in a local shopping center parking lot after nearby trees were sprayed with a neonicotinoid pesticide. Currently, Minnesota is considering enacting a neonicotinoids ban in response to community outcry over its potential side effects.[vi] The state has now initiated a six-month in-depth review into the matter. [vii] The results of this study will determine the state's next action in regards to the use of neonicotinoids. Additionally, there is a recent bill in Congress advocating for a neonicotinoid pesticide ban called the "Saving America's Pollinator Act" that is currently under review by a House subcommittee.[viii]

If bees continue to die for unknown reasons at the present alarming rate, the issue of whether neonicotinoid pesticides play a role in those killings becomes more and more important. Bees are vital to human survival. As pollinators, bees are responsible for pollinating one-third of the world's crops,[ix] which is equivalent to about \$15 billion worth of agricultural production.[x] Due to the controversial findings on the side effects of neonicotinoids and the need to halt the unexplained bee deaths, a potential ban on neonicotinoid pesticides is becoming a more imminent concern, as either the resolution or continued instability of this issue will not only have a domestic influence but will impact the world.

[i] *Colony Collapse Disorder: European Bans on Neonicotinoid Pesticides*, U.S. Envtl. Prot. Agency,

<http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/about/intheworks/ccd-european-ban.html> (<http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/about/intheworks/ccd-european-ban.html>) (last updated Aug. 15, 2013).

[ii] *Chemicals Implicated: Neonicotinoids*, Beyond Pesticides, <http://www.beyondpesticides.org/pollinators/chemicals.php>

(<http://www.beyondpesticides.org/pollinators/chemicals.php>) (last visited Nov. 18, 2014).

[iii] *Id.*

[iv] Jon Entine, *Bee Deaths Reversal: As Evidence Points Away From Neonics As Driver, Pressure Builds to Rethink Ban*, *Forbes* (Feb. 5,

2014, 1:30 PM) <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jonentine/2014/02/05/bee-deaths-reversal-as-evidence-points-away-from-neonics-as-driver-pressure-builds-to-rethink-ban/2/> (<http://www.forbes.com/sites/jonentine/2014/02/05/bee-deaths-reversal-as-evidence-points-away-from-neonics-as-driver-pressure-builds-to-rethink-ban/2/>).

[v] Alan Bjerga, *Bee Deaths Prompt Calls for U.S. to Ban Some Pesticides*, *Bloomberg* (May 12, 2014, 2:18 PM)

<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-05-14/bee-deaths-prompt-calls-for-u-s-to-ban-some-pesticides.html> (<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-05-14/bee-deaths-prompt-calls-for-u-s-to-ban-some-pesticides.html>).

[vi] Tony Kennedy, *State raises possibility of banning neonicotinoids*, *Star Tribune* (Oct. 29, 2014, 12:41 PM)

<http://www.startribune.com/local/280703022.html>

[vii] *Id.*

[viii] H.R. 2692, 113th Cong. (2013).

[ix] *Bee deaths: EU to ban neonicotinoid pesticides*, *BBC News Europe* (April 29, 2013, 10:15 PM) <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-22335520> (<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-22335520>).

[x] Bjerga, *supra* note v.

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