



Issue: Bee Health

Background: We are taught early on that bees are beneficial insects. The value of insect pollination to U.S. agricultural production is estimated at \$16 billion annually; about three-fourths of the value is attributable to honey bees.

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimates of overwinter bee colony losses have averaged more than 30 percent annually in recent years. (Since many beekeepers have been able to replace lost hives, overall honey bee colony numbers are stable.) Science suggests multiple factors for the decline in bee health including; parasites, diet and nutrition, lack of genetic diversity, habitat loss, beekeeping management practices, weather, and viruses. A 2013 joint USDA and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) report found the varroa mite as the “most detrimental pest of honeybees.”

Some have unjustifiably singled out pesticides as the primary cause for the decline in bee health, focusing specifically on a class of pesticides known as neonicotinoids. As part of its periodic review of every pesticide, EPA is presently reevaluating neonicotinoids to ensure they meet contemporary health and environmental standards. While the process is expected to last until 2018, EPA can impose use restrictions sooner, if the data warrants such action. In fact, last August, EPA amended language on neonicotinoid product labels to better safeguard bees from unintended exposure.

When used improperly, pesticides can indeed be harmful to bees. Pest management professionals (PMPs), however, have met their states’ pesticide applicator licensing and certification requirements and are trained to apply pesticides according to label directions. The byproduct of EPA’s evaluation of a pesticide’s potential environmental and health hazards, labels are an extension of federal and state pesticide law. Of course, bees can also be pests, infesting homes and threatening human health in certain situations. Consequently, PMPs are frequently contacted to manage such problems. While many PMPs do try to preserve honey bee colonies for beekeepers to take, sometimes treating bees with a pesticide is unavoidable.

When used according to the label, there has been no demonstrated negative effect on bee health associated with use of neonicotinoid insecticides. Moreover, the chairwoman of a major National Academy of Sciences study on the loss of pollinators recently said she was “extremely dubious” that banning neonicotinoids would have any positive effect. Nevertheless, in December, the European Union, using worst-case exposure assumptions and an overly conservative interpretation of the precautionary principle, imposed a two-year moratorium on certain uses of three neonicotinoid pesticides. Similar legislation is pending in Congress.

Action: **The National Pest Management Association urges Members of Congress to withhold support from measures that unfairly blame pesticides for the decline in bee health, overlooking the widespread science that shows this is an extremely complex issue with multiple factors involved. NPMA also urges Members to join the Congressional Pollinator Protection Caucus (CP2C), a bipartisan group dedicated to protecting pollinators and their habitat.**