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Give bees a chance

EU Commission gets strong support in favour of its proposal to ban three neonicotinoids

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Neonicotinoids - or “neonics” - are amongst the most widely used insecticides worldwide. They belong to a class of neuro-active insecticides and are chemically similar to nicotine. Not only do they kill unwanted bugs, they are also very harmful for bees, and so at very low doses: bees become disoriented, unable to return to their hives, communicate within the colony, remember and learn. And as such, neonics may well contribute to the collapse of the colonies observed in certain regions of the world.

Less harmful tools not only available to farmers, but also required to be used

The industry argues against the bans by stating that this would reduce the toolbox available to farmers and would thus increase resistances.

Truth is, the real alternative to resistance building is so called “integrated pest management”: the promotion of low pesticide-input pest management, giving wherever possible priority to non-chemical methods, with professional users of pesticides switching to practices and products with the lowest risk to human health and the environment among those available for the same pest problem.

The promotion of integrated pest management is already required by EU law, in [Directive 2009/128/EC — EU action to achieve the sustainable use of pesticides](#) (Article 14).

Furthermore, EU Member States must adopt national plans setting objectives, targets, measures and timetables to reduce health and environmental risks from pesticide use, ensure that all professional users,

distributors and advisors receive proper training, and they must also inform the general public and promote awareness-raising programmes about the potential risks from pesticides.

Unfortunately, for the moment the directive on the sustainable use of pesticides faces [a serious lack of implementation](#).

EU Commission increases the ambition

In May 2013 the [European commission suspended](#) the use of three neonicotinoid insecticides - due to their damaging impact on bee populations. The use and sale of seeds treated with clothianidin, thiamethoxam or imidacloprid, was prohibited in the EU as of December 2013 for summer crops, while allowing the continued use on winter crops and foliar treatment after flowering.

According to the [Pesticides Action Network](#), “the high risk posed by these 3 chemicals is linked to the fact that they are the most potent and systemic insecticides ever produced by agrochemical industry. They are persistent in soils. Because they are systemic, the soil residues are absorbed by succeeding crops as well as by flowering weeds adjacent to the treated crops. They contaminate water streams and can now be found anywhere in the environment. Wild flowers’ nectar is contaminated as well as rain water”.

In March 2017, the European commission proposed to go a step further and to strengthen the restrictions on the three substances as it was found that high risks remained with the remaining uses, inter alia due to residues in the soil. The only use that is to remain allowed is permanent greenhouses where the crop stays its entire life.

Last week, one member of the conservative ECR group in the European Parliament tried to oppose this move politically (no veto right for the European Parliament). However, she was strongly defeated at the vote. Despite efforts by industry to halt bans on neonicotinoids, there is a clear majority at the European Parliament in favour of the Commission’s proposal to ban clothianidin, thiamethoxam and imidacloprid.

The Greens/EFA are now urging Member States to be as progressive as the European Parliament and not only to vote in favour of the Commission’s proposal without further delay, but also to refrain from adopting national emergency authorisations to circumvent the EU wide ban.



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