

Are Pesticides Behind Massive Bee Die-Offs?

For the German chemical giant Bayer, neonicotinoid pesticides—synthetic derivatives of nicotine that attack insects' nervous systems—are big business. In 2010, the company reeled in 789 million euros (more than \$1 billion) in revenue from its flagship neonic products imidacloprid and clothianidin. The company's latest quarterly report shows that its "seed treatment" segment—the one that includes neonics—is booming. In the quarter that ended on September 30, sales for the company's seed treatments jumped 28 percent compared to the same period the previous year.

Such results no doubt bring cheer to Bayer's shareholders. But for honeybees—whose population has come under severe pressure from a mysterious condition called colony collapse disorder—the news is decidedly less welcome. A year ago on Grist, I told the story of how this class of pesticides had gained approval from the EPA in a twisted process based on deeply flawed (by the EPA's own account) Bayer-funded science. A little later, I reported that research by the USDA's top bee scientist, Jeff Pettis, suggests that even tiny exposure to neonics can seriously harm honeybees.

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