USDA report on bee health: Restating inaction

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USDA report on bee health: Restating inaction

Earlier today, the U.S. Department of Agriculture released a report on honey bee health compiled from conference presentations last October. The conference and report follow widespread public attention to declining bee populations in the United States, declines increasingly linked to pesticides. The report also comes in the same week that European leaders voted to enact a continent-wide restriction on the use of bee-harming pesticides.

In October, conference participants—largely comprised of federal officials, pesticide manufacturers and some beekeepers—failed to develop a set of shared conclusions and clear next steps to protect honey bee health. According to today's USDA report, an action plan is 5-10 years away.

In response to the report, Paul Towers, a spokesperson for Pesticide Action Network, released the following statement:

> "Federal officials have failed to take the issue of bee declines seriously. Following the worst year for bee losses in U.S. history, officials have focused on a series of bureaucratic processes rather than coordinated action. The new report from USDA restates some important points in existing research but misses the bigger picture.
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> Multiple factors are at play in bee declines, including nutrition, pathogens and pesticides—with science increasingly pointing to pesticides, alone and in combination with other stressors, as a key catalyst. There is no silver bullet when it comes to protecting bees, and we should take a comprehensive approach to protecting pollinators. But we know pesticides, specifically neonicotinoids, are harming bees and policymakers should be taking immediate action to address this known threat. Bees cannot wait.
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> Europe took bold action earlier this week by following the science and restricting the use of bee-harming products. The U.S. needs to step up and protect bees too.
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> Instead of taking decisive action to protect bees, beekeeper livelihoods and the agricultural economies relying on pollination services, EPA and USDA continue to be swayed by pressure from pesticide manufacturers. Officials have the mandate to restrict pesticides that pose harm to the economy and the environment. It's time for them to do just that."

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