

Beekeepers put the pressure on EPA

Jul 9, 2013 by Paul Towers



As many of us geared up for Fourth of July festivities, the nation's largest beekeeper organizations filed a [legal action](#) against EPA for its approval of a new bee-harming pesticide.

EPA is unable (or unwilling) to act decisively to protect bees, instead fast-tracking a new pesticide to market. Beekeepers aren't taking the issues lightly, and have turned to asserting legal pressure on the agency.

Bret Adee, a beekeeper of Adee Honey Farms with operations in South Dakota and California — and a petitioner on the case — put it like this:

"The EPA is charged with preventing unreasonable risk to our livestock, our livelihoods, and most importantly, the nation's food supply. This situation requires an immediate correction from the EPA to ensure the survival of commercial pollinators, native pollinators, and the plentiful supply of seed, fruits, vegetables and nuts that pollinators make possible."

Despite evidence about the harms of pesticides, and research questions left unanswered, the EPA pushed forward with approving Dow's [sulfoxaflor](#). The pesticide is a close cousin of neonicotinoids, with similarly harmful impacts on bee brains. If the roll-out of this product continues, sulfoxaflor will be used on a wide variety of fruits, vegetables and other crops bees routinely pollinate.

Last year, Beekeepers — as well as PAN and partner groups — [filed a legal petition and then a lawsuit](#) against EPA for its failure to protect bees from the harms of two neonicotinoid pesticides. And this year, over the objections of dozens of beekeepers and 10,000 comments from PAN supporters, EPA approved Dow's sulfoxaflor in May.

Jeff Anderson, a beekeeper and owner of California-Minnesota Honey Farms — and also a petitioner on the case — signaled the urgency of the situation:

"EPA continues to exacerbate the pressures on beekeepers, whose operations are on the edge of collapse."

As the link between bee declines and pesticides is ever more clear, with [new research](#) adding to the

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[growing body of evidence](#), action from EPA is ever more urgent. While not the only factor at play, neonicotinoids have been shown to kill bees outright — and sublethal effects are also incredibly damaging.

A study out of the United Kingdom suggests that imidacloprid — a commonly used neonicotinoid — can compromise the neurological process of bees, making them more susceptible to other stresses such as pests, disease and bad weather. Dr. Richard Stöger of the University of Nottingham describes it like this:

"Although larvae can still grow and develop in the presence of imidacloprid, the stability of the developmental process appears to be compromised."

Glimmer of progress?

What's surprising is how little EPA has done to date, given the dramatic scale of bee losses. But the agency is feeling more pressure from all sides. And with urgency from Canadian and U.S. state officials, there is a glimmer of progress.

Here are a few developments from recent weeks:

- Canadian beekeepers report that they [lost 37 million bees last year alone](#), and in one case, encouraging family to leave the flailing business. As a result, beekeepers in at least two provinces are pushing for bans.
- And just as many of us set out to celebrate National Pollinator Week in mid-June, Oregon residents witnessed a [particularly compelling die-off](#) of some 50,000 bumble-bees outside a Target retail store, that led state agricultural officials to impose restrictions on that specific neonicotinoid pesticide.
- PAN joined dozens of organizations, including the Center for Food Safety and Beyond Pesticides, in [penning a letter](#) to the Obama Administration calling for action.
- In the ill-fated House Farm Bill, a bi-partisan majority [passed an amendment](#) that called on EPA to improve federal coordination in addressing the dramatic decline in bee populations, as well as directing the government to regularly monitor and report on pollinator health.

Under legal pressure from beekeepers, even more science highlighting harms to bees from pesticides, and state governments considering action on these chemicals, it's time for EPA to rise to the occasion.

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