

# European Agency Says Insecticides a Threat to Honey Bees

RELEASED ON 17/01/13 (DD/MM/YY)

European authorities said three insecticides long suspected of contributing to plunging populations of honey bees pose risks to the insects and called for such chemicals to be placed under tougher scrutiny.

The finding by scientists at the European Food Safety Authority adds fuel to a debate that has raged in recent years in North America and Europe over the cause of mass deaths in the bee colonies that farmers depend on to pollinate their crops. And it could raise pressure on U.S. regulators, who are now reviewing the environmental effects of the chemicals, to withdraw them from the lucrative U.S. market.

France, Germany, Italy and other European nations previously banned or suspended the use of certain insecticides, known as neonicotinoids, that many farmers and scientists argue are the main causes of declining honey bee populations. The pesticide industry and other scientists say disease and environmental changes are responsible.

The risk assessment, published Wednesday, said three neonicotinoids—clothianidin and imidacloprid, which are made primarily by Bayer AG, and thiamethoxam, which is made by Syngenta AG—pose risks to bees through contaminated dust and pesticide residues on nectar and pollen.

The agency sees a "high acute risk" to bees in how the three insecticides are applied to cereals, cotton, rapeseed, corn and sunflowers.

Its analysis "proposed a much more comprehensive risk assessment for bees and also introduced a higher level of scrutiny for interpretation of field studies," the agency said. But the agency said data aren't available to conclude that the insecticides are contributing to the collapse of bee colonies.

The European Commission, the European Union's executive arm, will request further information from the companies producing the chemicals, a commission spokesman said. The EU is prepared to take "necessary measures" if further studies show a definitive threat to bee populations from the chemicals, the spokesman said.

A top executive at Syngenta criticized the study. "It is obvious to us that EFSA has found itself under political pressure to produce a hurried and inadequate risk assessment, which even they acknowledge contains a high level of uncertainty," said John Atkin, Syngenta's chief operating officer, in a statement. "This report is unworthy of EFSA and of its scientists."

EFSA didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

Bayer said it stands by previous data it has submitted to regulatory agencies showing the chemicals don't harm bees if used as approved in Europe. "We do not believe that the new EFSA reports alter the quality and validity of these risk assessments and the underlying studies," the German chemical giant said.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, which regulates pesticides, says it is unaware of any data showing that neonicotinoids have contributed to the collapse of bee colonies. Researchers at the U.S. Department of Agriculture are examining the issue, but the department says it has found no evidence linking use of the pesticides to mass bee deaths.

The EPA has refused emergency requests from environmental groups to remove a number of neonicotinoids from the market. But the agency, responding to public pressure, has accelerated a periodic safety review of the chemicals to see if additional restrictions are needed on their use.

Environmental groups say the EPA is moving too slowly. They are considering suing to force the agency to take action.

"The EPA has a huge compliance problem," said Jay Feldman, executive director of the anti-pesticides group Beyond Pesticides.

The EPA didn't respond immediately to a request for comment.

Neonicotinoids have been replacing other pesticides in the U.S. that are considered more dangerous and have been gradually removed from the U.S. market.

An industry-backed study published on Monday says that a ban or suspension on the use of neonicotinoids could cost the EU more than €17 billion (\$22.68 billion) in lower crop yields over a five-year period. Were the pesticides no longer available, the 27-nation bloc would also see a significant drop in food production at a time of increasing global demand, the study said.

*SOURCE Wall Street Journal*

**RELATED STORIES**

[EU Seed Treatment Ban Could Cost EUR17 Billion in Lower Crop Yields](#)