Press Release

New Study finds Alternatives to Dangerous Neonicotinoid Insecticides

BeeLife European Beekeeping Coordination
26 February 2018
Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium

The Task Force on Systemic Pesticides has just published a new study that puts into question the value of neonicotinoid insecticides. Researchers from different nationalities have come together and confirmed that there are other effective alternatives to neonicotinoid-coated seeds. By compiling and reviewing over 200 studies on neonicotinoids performance, the Task Force presents both the inefficacy of the insecticides and introduce some valuable alternatives.

BeeLife's Scientific Advisor, Dr Noa Simón Delso, has co-authored the study which includes evidence on the problems with neonicotinoids. With evidence compiled since their introduction to the market in the 1990s, researchers have found them to be extremely toxic to biodiversity. Neonicotinoids are highly toxic at very low doses, water soluble and degrade very slowly in soil. Their popularity and prolonged application cause large-scale environmental contamination, with both lethal and sub-lethal effects on pollinators, including bees.

Besides the dangers that come with the application of neonicotinoids, there is also evidence of very low benefits. According to the study's findings, the use of treated seeds does not increase crop yield in most cases. The issue of over-reliance on pesticides such as neonicotinoids has also caused a developed resistance from pests and therefore an increased cost for farmers. There have been cases found on which the use of neonicotinoids is not only unjustified, but its risks surpass by far its possible benefits.

Task Force co-chair Jean-Marc Bonmatin stated that "over-reliance on systemic insecticides for pest control is inflicting serious damage to the environmental services that underpin agricultural productivity. This new research is exciting because it's proven the existence and feasibility of a number of alternative, integrated pest management models - which are far better for the environment without increasing costs or risks for farmers."

The alternatives presented in the study include landscape solutions, such as ecological corridors management; applying better farming methods, including crop rotations; the use of biological control methods, as natural predators and micro-organisms; and other environmentally safe methods (traps, repellents, naturally-derived insecticides).

Besides the mentioned alternatives, it also presents two innovative solutions. First, a low-cost and reliable prediction method to appropriately target pest management

pesticides. For example, through such prediction method, it has been possible to find that 96 percent of North Italy's corn fields do not need any insecticide treatment. Second, it also sets the first step towards a novel insurance method. A "mutual fund" insurance in large scale is a cost-effective approach. It even has a lower cost than the total cost of insecticide treatments.

BeeLife's President Francesco Panella has recognised that "the information published today shows how, once again, conventional farming practices have surpassed production tools. The parasites became resistant to neonicotinoids. The concrete experience of this new research, as in several other scientific studies, shows more and more apparent that innovation in agriculture cannot be limited to replacing one chemical product for another. From day to day the consensus is growing for real innovative choices in the future Common Agricultural Policy to stimulate the implementation of this type of alternatives throughout Europe".

According to the Task Force, "only a tiny fraction of pesticide use serves its purpose to fight pests. The rest contaminates the environment", which means that alternatives are not only convenient for cost-effectiveness. The research and application of pesticide alternatives become necessary in order to protect the environment and its biodiversity.

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Full Study: An update of the Worldwide Integrated Assessment (WIA) on systemic insecticides. Part 3: alternatives to systemic insecticides

NOTE TO EDITORS:

BeeLife European Beekeeping Coordination is an association formed by professionals of the beekeeping sector from different countries of the European Union. Its main activity is the study of the impact on bees of environmental threats such as pesticides or genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

BeeLife works for the protection of bees based on the principle that 'bees serve as the canary in the gold mine', sounding the alarm that something is 'wrong in the environment'. Not least, bees create 30% of all our food by pollinating fruits, vegetables and arable crops such as sunflower and oilseed rape, having an inherent value that the Coordination is working to protect.