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Bee Killing Pesticide Yields No Benefit To Soy Farmers According To EPA Study

Milton, ON. The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has released their analysis of the benefits of neonicotinoid seed treatments for insect control in United States soybean production. These systemic pesticides which are applied to corn and soybean seeds have been linked to bee kills in Ontario by Health Canada.

“We have made the review of neonicotinoid pesticides a high priority,” said Jim Jones, assistant administrator for EPA’s Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention. “In our analysis of the economic benefits of this use we concluded that, on a national scale, U.S. soybean farmers see little or no benefit from neonicotinoid seed treatments.”

The analysis concluded that:

- There is no increase in soybean yield using most neonicotinoid seed treatments when compared to using no pest control at all.
- Alternative insecticides applied as sprays are available and effective.
- All major alternatives are comparable in cost.
- Neonicotinoid seed treatment could provide an insurance benefit against sporadic and unpredictable insect pests, but this potential benefit is not likely to be large or widespread throughout the United States.

Ontario grows approximately 70% of Canada’s soybeans covering 2.5 million acres. Currently, nearly 65% of soybean seeds are treated with neonicotinoids, which are known to be extremely toxic to insects and bees in infinitesimal (parts per billion) amounts.

According to the EPA report, most farmers have been using neonicotinoids without actually identifying the presence of insect pests that would be controlled by these pesticides. This finding confirms the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs’ (OMAFRA) own crop specialists’ observations that only 10-30% of corn, soy and winter wheat acreage actually need some form of assistance for pests.

Ontario beekeepers have experienced a serious decline in bee population since neonicotinoid seed treatments have been the default seed treatment for corn and soybeans. Last winter 58% of Ontario honey bee colonies were lost, over three times the average for all other Canadian provinces.

“The EPA study is more evidence that pesticide manufacturers are operating irresponsibly,” said Tibor Szabo, VP of the Ontario Beekeepers Association. “By pre-treating seed with pesticides, farmers pay for their product whether they need it or not. The loss of our insect pollinators is the price we pay for their profit.”

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The OBA supports the Ontario Government's proposal for a permitting system to limit the use of neonicotinoids. Under this policy, high producing hybrids seed would be sold without pesticide treatments. Farmers who demonstrate pest pressures could then apply to have their seeds treated with neonicotinoids. "But given the results of this study, we would expect that very few, if any, would actually benefit from this pesticide," concluded Szabo.

For the EPA Report: http://www2.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2014-10/documents/benefits_of_neonicotinoid_seed_treatments_to_soybean_production_2.pdf

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