April 2013

Farming without neonicotinoids: Yes, we can!

Is it possible to farm without neonicotinoids? For further information visit our website where you can find details of the conference 'Pollinator friendly farming is possible' which was held in the European Parliament in March. Pictures and presentations are now available and detailed report will be published soon. A list of examples of alternative to pesticides including neonicotinoids has already started. If you want to send website links, documents, personal testimony and initiative of farming without neonicotinoids, please do it via info@bee-life.eu **!**

The Key messages of the conference are presented below.

Do we really have to continue using neonicotinoids?

- **Neonicotinoid use is unjustified.**
  Insecticides are commonly used as a preventive treatment. This means that neonicotinoids often fight against insects that are not present. Moreover, where pests are present, they often have a limited negative impact on crops production and on economic output for farmers (e.g. maize).

- **Neonicotinoids are unsafe.**
  Imidacloprid, thiamethoxam and clothianidin pose a risk for bees and the environment. This means that these products do not comply with the European legislation on pesticides[1]. These risks have been identified by the EFSA[2] based on solid and independent scientific publications. As a result the European Commission's proposal for the temporary suspension of certain applications of neonicotinoids goes in the right direction. The proposal could go even further by placing a complete ban on these products for a longer period than only 2 years.

- **Projected impact of reduced production levels and jobs losses are not based on reality and aim at inducing fear among the population including decision-makers.**
  The pesticide industry's has projected losses of up to € 17 billion in five years and 50,000 of jobs if neonicotinoids were withdrawn from the market. These data, however, have not been scientifically validated, while the industry fails to mention that in Europe the value of pollinators to food production only in terms of pollination is estimated to be 27 billion euros[3,4] each year.

Are there alternatives to neonicotinoids?

- Simple agronomic techniques can help farmers to avoid neonicotinoid use, with the same level of production. Crop rotation, cultivation of different plant varieties, and stimulation of beneficial insects have demonstrated to be successful alternatives. In case these farming practices cannot be established on the farm or the use of pesticides is justified, then biological controls (provision of natural predators) are a solution.
- Biological control (such as the use of nematodes) is currently more expensive than pesticides because the massive use of neonicotinoids does not allow producers of alternatives to make economics of scale: their market is too narrow (lock-in system).

How to ensure a better future?

Generally, pesticides hide the real problems: the poor health of agro-ecosystems and poor farming practices. In order to tackle these problems it is necessary to:

- Find and foster synergies between soil, plant and animal at the heart of trainings programmes for farmers, agro-technicians, agronomists and researchers.
- Promote exchanges between researchers, farmers and businesses that have implemented sustainable initiatives in order to demonstrate the success of farming systems without neonicotinoids, profitable and productive cropping systems.

– – –

[1] Regulation (EC) 1107/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 October 2009 concerning the placing of plant protection products on the market and repealing Council Directives 79/117/EEC and 91/414/EEC.

[2] Conclusion on the peer review of the pesticide risk assessment for bees for the active substance clothianidin, imidacloprid, thiamethoxam - EFSA (2013).

[3] Lautenbach S, Seppelt R, *et al.* (2012). Spatial and temporal trends of global pollination benefit. PLoS ONE 7 (4): e35954.

[4] Gallai N. Salles JM, Settele J, Vaissière B. (2009). Economic valuation of the vulnerability of world agriculture confronted with pollinator decline. Ecological Economics 68, 810–821.

– – –

Conference Organizers:

Bart Staes Greens/EFA MEP and the Campaign Give bees a chance
PAN Europe
European Beekeeping Coordination

Partners:

Pajottenlander – Slow Food – Slow Food Karikol – L'Heureux Nouveau

– – –

For more information, contact: Francesco Panella, spokesman for the European Beekeeping Coordination. Tel: +32 10 47 16 34, info@bee-life.eu - www.bee-life.eu