

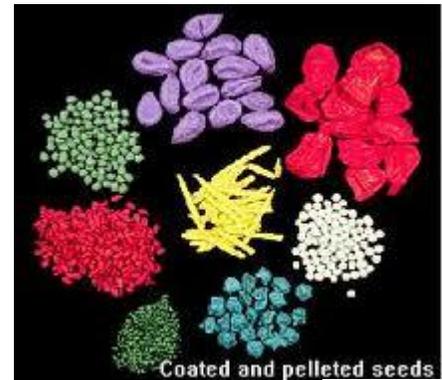
Pollinator News

Jan. 9, 2016

Beekeepers, Farmers, and Public Interest Groups Sue EPA over Failed Oversight of Neonicotinoid-coated Seeds

Center for Food Safety, on behalf of several beekeepers, farmers and sustainable agriculture and conservation groups, filed a lawsuit January 6th (http://www.centerforfoodsafety.org/files/2016-1-6-dkt-1--pls--complaint_11142.pdf) challenging the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) inadequate regulation of the neonicotinoid insecticide seed coatings used on dozens of crops. EPA has allowed millions of pounds of coated seeds to be planted annually on more than 150 million acres nationwide. The lawsuit alleges the agency has illegally allowed this to occur, without requiring the coated seeds to be registered under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA), without enforceable labels on the seed bags, and without adequate assessments of the serious ongoing environmental harm.

“EPA’s actions surrounding neonicotinoid seed coatings have led to intensifying and destructive consequences. These include acute honey bee kills, as well as chronic effects to numerous species, nationwide water and soil contamination, and other environmental and economic harms,” said Peter Jenkins, attorney with Center for Food Safety. “This lawsuit aims to hold EPA accountable to dramatically reduce this harm in the future.”



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Neonicotinoids are a class of insecticides known to have acute and chronic effects on honey bees and other pollinator species and are considered a major factor in overall bee population declines and poor health. Up to 95 percent of the applied seed coating ends up in the surrounding air, soil and water rather than in the crop for which it was intended, leading to extensive contamination.

“My honey farm business is not capable of surviving another three to five years if EPA chooses to 'drag out' the treated article exemption in the courts at the request of the pesticide industry instead of properly regulating these pesticides. People need pollinated food; somebody must stand up and say no to unregulated killing of pollinators,” said Jeff Anderson, beekeeper and the lead plaintiff in the case.

“After experiencing a large loss of bees this spring due to corn planting ‘dust off,’ I believe that it is of critical importance that this defective product not be used as a prophylactic seed treatment,” said Bret Adee, owner of the largest commercial beekeeping operation in the country.

“As a beekeeper for over 50 years, I have lost more colonies of honey bees in the last ten years from the after effects of neonic seed coatings than all others causes over the first 40 plus years of my beekeeping

operation,” said beekeeper David Hackenberg. “This not only affects my honey bees, but as a farmer it also affects my land and the health of my soil. It is time for EPA to accept the responsibility to protect not only our honey bees and other pollinators, but also our soil and our environment.”

“Farmers rely on the crop pollination services of beekeepers to increase the yield of their crops. Farmers need clear, concise pesticide label guidelines in order to protect their crops and protect honey bees. Healthy relationships between soil and water, beekeepers and farmers, and beneficial insects and crops are essential to an affordable and sustainable food supply,” said Michele Colopy, program director at the Pollinator Stewardship Council, Inc.

The cost-effectiveness of neonicotinoid seed coatings has been challenged in recent years, with numerous studies indicating that their near ubiquitous use is unnecessary — and making EPA’s disregard of their risks all the more harmful. Along with honey bees, wild bees and other beneficial insects are in serious decline, leading to reduced yields. Overuse of the insecticides threatens sustainable agriculture going forward.

“I began to question the value of neonicotinoids after some side-by-side comparisons showed little if any yield advantage. Shortly after this I began to hear of the possible connection between neonicotinoids and their detriment to honey bees, and I stopped using them altogether,” said Kansas grain farmer Gail Fuller of Fuller Farms.

“A single seed coated with a neonicotinoid insecticide is enough to kill a songbird. There is no justification for EPA to exempt these pesticide delivery devices from regulation. American Bird Conservancy urges the agency to evaluate the risks to birds, bees, butterflies, and other wildlife,” said Cynthia Palmer, director of pesticides science and regulation at American Bird Conservancy.

"EPA can't bury its head in the sand any longer. Seed coatings are just the latest delivery device of pesticide corporations that pose a threat to pollinators and the food system," said Marcia Ishii- Eiteman, senior scientist at Pesticide Action Network. "Given widespread use and persistence of these bee-harming pesticides, it's time for EPA to fully and swiftly evaluate the impacts of seed coatings — and prevent future harm.”

EPA has also allowed several other similar systemic seed-coating insecticides onto the market and appears poised to approve additional coating products in the near future.

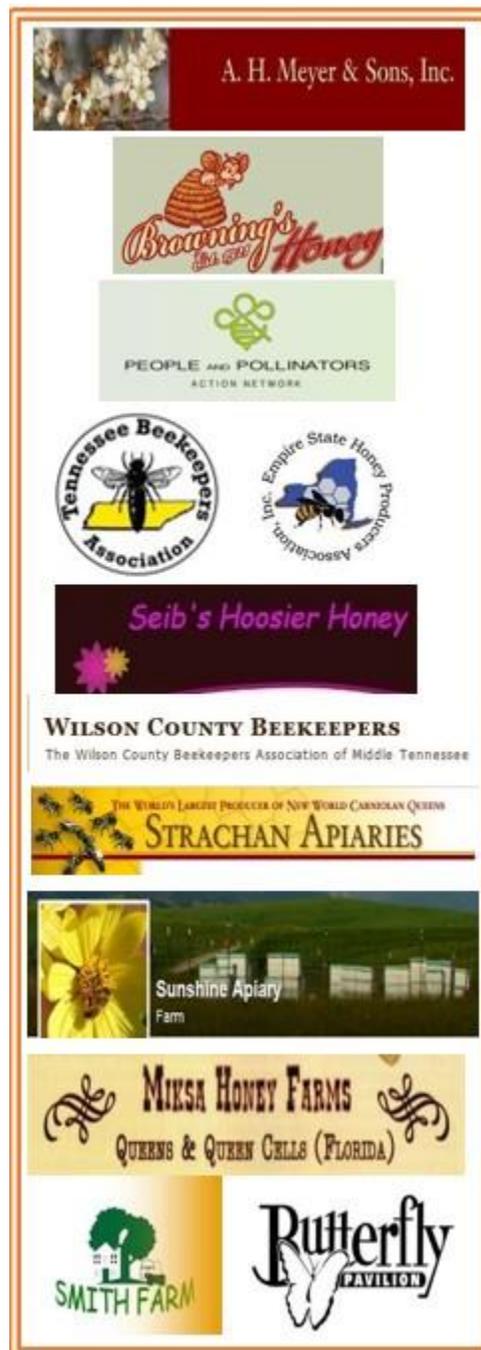
The plaintiffs in the case are beekeepers Jeff Anderson, Bret Adee, David Hackenberg, and Pollinator Stewardship Council, farmers Lucas Criswell and Gail Fuller, and public interest and conservation groups American Bird Conservancy, Center for Food Safety and Pesticide Action Network of North America.

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