

BEE HEALTH

Syngenta challenges EU suspension of pesticide

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Swiss pesticide producer Syngenta has filed a legal challenge to the European Union's suspension of one of its insecticides – suspected of contributing to the decline in bee populations which has been observed all over Europe.

The Basel-based company said in the challenge filed on Tuesday that the decision to suspend thiamethoxam was based on a “flawed process” and had been made without the full support of EU member states.

In a press release on the company's website, Syngenta's chief operating officer, John Atkin, said the company “would prefer not to take legal action but have no other choice given our firm belief that the Commission wrongly linked thiamethoxam to the decline in bee health. In suspending the product, it breached EU pesticide legislation and incorrectly applied the precautionary principle.”

A second major pesticide producer, Bayer Crop Science, said on Tuesday that it had filed a similar legal challenge with the Court of Justice of the European Union in Luxembourg in mid-August.

Thiamethoxam belongs to a class of insecticides called neonicotinoids, which act on the nerves. The EU announced in April that it would suspend the use of neonicotinoids for two years beginning in December 2013 because of concerns that it affects bees' orientation and navigation.

Understanding the problem

The US Environmental Protection Agency has also said that on the basis of currently available data it has drawn similar conclusions about the potential of neonicotinoids for acute effects and uncertainty about chronic risks. However, it has not decided to ban them, but is re-evaluating them.

Syngenta, the world's largest crop chemical company, maintains that banning the pesticide will “simply close the door to understanding the problem.” It says that “many years of independent monitoring prove that when used properly – as they consistently are – neonicotinoids do not damage the health of bee populations.”

Bayer claimed that its pesticides Imidacloprid and Clothianidin have been on the market for many years and have been extensively tested and approved. According to EU guidelines, approved products can only be banned if there is new evidence of their negative effects, Bayer Crop Science said.

In March 2013 Syngenta and Bayer CropScience joined in proposing an action plan to “help unlock the EU stalemate on bee health”.

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