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Study: Neonicotinoid pesticides have minimal impact on bees

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During late June, the *Los Angeles Times* published a story citing a recent study conducted by UK scientists and published in *Science* magazine. The mainstream news media claimed that neonicotinoid pesticides have been found to do harm honey and wild bees.

However, Competitive Enterprise Institute Senior Fellow Andrea Lagomasini reviewed the manuscript and found that the study says quite the opposite and that neonic pesticides have very little effect on bees and any such impact can be mitigated.

Neonics are systemic pesticides, which means they can be applied to seeds and are then absorbed into the plants. Accordingly, unlike sprayed pesticides that affect any insects on the plant at treatment time, only the crop-destroying insects that chew on the plants have significant exposures. Bees can have trace exposures because they bring pollen and nectar back to the hives. Accordingly, the study was designed to measure traces of the chemicals found in hives and any resulting impacts on bees.

Funded in part by two companies that make these chemicals—Syngenta and Bayer CropScience—this recent study attempted to assess the impact of the chemicals in real-life scenarios, rather than in a lab. Accordingly, it involved field tests, measuring exposures after bees foraged in oil seed rape (known as canola in the United States) crops in Hungary, Germany, and the United Kingdom. The researchers discussed their findings in an article for Science magazine, but the full dataset was made available to scientists at Syngenta and Bayer CropScience.

Logamasini cites remarks by Syngenta's scientist at a recent event hosted by the Science Media Centre in the UK who said:

This CEH paper does not present the full set of data analysis conducted by CEH and reported to Syngenta for honeybees. For example the pre-winter data analysis carried out by CEH which showed that any effects reported during the flowering period had disappeared (i.e. recovery), were not included in the paper. There were in fact 258 separate honeybee statistical data analyses reported to Syngenta by CEH. Out of these analyses, 238 resulted in no effect, 7 resulted in beneficial effects, 4 with insufficient data and only and 9 resulting in negative effects. The rules for statistical significance allow for a 5% probability of generating random

effects. Therefore based on this internationally accepted statistical benchmark and the 258 analysis CEH carried out, we could expect 13 random results. Therefore the –ve and +ve results reported by CEH could easily be random i.e. not real, and a conclusion of no effect of the neonics reached. It should also be noted that the pollen and nectar residue analysis reported by CEH in this paper indicated that circa 95% of the time no neonic residues were measured, even in samples taken directly from the treated crop. Therefore bees in these trials were hardly ever exposed to any neonic residues.
She not only gives insights on Syngenta's scientist's statement but also points to an essay by a Hoover Institution scholar and quotes one of the manuscript's authors Ben Woodcock who authored a commentary on the study and neonics in a commentary published online earlier in the month. You can read Ms. Logamasini's blog post here.

This isn't the first time the mainstream media have misrepresented or outright lied about the results of scientific research and, unfortunately, it will not be the last. The slanted news coverage about issues, like pesticides or climate change, are in-kind contributions to environmentalist groups and prefer leftist advocacy rather than reporting the facts.