

# Agri-food sector gearing up for neonic consultations

Government says it will listen to concerns about lack of useful alternatives to neonics

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Published: September 17, 2018  
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Farm groups are readying for battle over the federal government's proposal to phase out more neonicotinoid pesticides.

They've signalled their intention to grill Health Canada and the Pesticide Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) over their plans to [eliminate the use of clothianidin and thiamethoxam](#) over the next three to five years because they pose a threat to aquatic insects.

Consultations with government officials are to run until the end of November and could become even sharper if [Health Canada goes ahead](#) with its scheduled announcement later this month it will proceed with a phase-out of imidacloprid, the third neonic registered for use in Canada because it's a danger to aquatic insects and pollinators.

"Sustainable production and science-based decisions about risk are the foundation of our industry," said Brian Innes, vice-president of public affairs for the Canola Council of Canada. Clothianidin and thiamethoxam "are very important for our growers, and without viable alternatives, the ban will significantly impact the canola sector."

The council is concerned about the loss of these two neonics because it would lead to lower yields and increase the risks for growers from [flea beetles](#). A study published in 2017 based on European growers' experience without these products showed that growers faced an increased risk of insect damage, had lower yields and, as a result, seeded less canola.

"With more than 22 million acres of canola in Canada in 2018, banning these plant protection tools would have a dramatic impact," the council said. "These products have been responsibly used by canola producers as a seed treatment to control pests as part of their integrated pest management programs."

The Canadian Horticulture Council said it was disappointed "to be potentially losing two valuable crop protection tools, leaving many growers with limited options. We hope that the PMRA will use real-use data when making its final decision, and that it will consider growers' critical need for safe, effective crop protection products that allow them to offer locally produced quality fruit and vegetables for Canadian consumers."

Pulse Canada said it will take its concerns about a lack of alternatives into the consultations while

Grain Growers of Canada has said it will comment further on the phase-out when it has completed its review of the mid-August announcement.

Pierre Petelle, CropLife Canada president and CEO, said, “There are some alternatives available for some crop/pest combinations, but not alternatives for all of them. We haven’t had an opportunity to review to provide more details, but it’s essential that farmers have a variety of tools to help them manage pest pressures.

“Pesticides are registered to address specific pest problems and when it comes to insects, they may only be effective on certain phases of the insect’s life cycle and/or under specific crop and climate conditions,” he said. “Furthermore, from a product stewardship perspective, having only one tool to manage a pest could lead to issues with resistance.

“This is why we advocate for farmers to have many tools in their tool box and why our members invest significantly into research and development of new products. Our concern is that these investments into research and development could be jeopardized in the future if such a modern class of insecticides with extremely low toxicity to humans and animals is not passing the PMRA’s assessment.”

When asked about agriculture concerns about the lack of alternatives to the two neonics, Health Canada said seven products were registered for most uses of clothianidin and thiamethoxam. It is currently consulting stakeholders on the suitability of these registered alternatives to these neonicotinoids. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada’s multi-stakeholder forum is also examining available alternatives.

The final decision will consider what to do “if no suitable alternatives to the use exist, as long as the human health and environmental risks, as well as value of the pesticide, are considered to be acceptable,” Health Canada said.

While the introduction of best management practices during the planting of corn and soybeans in Ontario, which is where the controversy over neonics began, has greatly reduced bee deaths, the department said it’s not convinced BMPs would correct the threat to aquatic insects.

It considered data for the 2017 season submitted by the Environmental Monitoring Working Group in its reviews of clothianidin and thiamethoxam, along with monitoring data available from other sources. They included “reports on potential risk mitigation measures such as methods for spray drift reduction and the use of vegetative filter strips to help reduce run-off into water bodies. These were also considered in the assessment of the special reviews.

“While other options are available, at this time, we do not have sufficient evidence that these proposed measures for the continued use of clothianidin and thiamethoxam will be sufficiently protective of aquatic insects.”

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