

FARM PRESS BLOG

Ill-advised pesticide ban costing European farmers up to half their crops

Oct 17, 2014 by [Forrest Laws](#) in [Farm Press Blog](#)

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Environmental activist groups have been demanding that EPA withdraw the FIFRA registrations for several products in the neonicotinoid class of insecticides because they (the activists) suspect they're having an adverse impact on bee populations.

So what's the big deal? Most farmers could probably get by with one or two less insecticides. After all, the amount of pesticide in a seed treatment is so miniscule as to be almost unobservable in scientific assays so canceling the label would probably have a minimal effect, right?

Actually, grain producers in the European Union countries are learning first hand what can happen when you ban a class of pesticides. Ten months after the European Commission temporarily barred the use of neonicotinoid insecticide applications, rapeseed producers in

the United Kingdom are experiencing crop losses of 20 percent to 50 percent due to an infestation of flea beetles.

“In what should have been a perfect growing season, some rapeseed crops have been totally abandoned due to the beetles,” according to Cotton’s Week (www.cotton.org).

UK officials have granted emergency authorization to spray neonicotinoids on oilseed rape – a temporary measure under the conditions of the ban, which is not as effective as seed-treated neonicotinoids.

Farmers in Germany, the EU’s biggest OSR producer, are experiencing similar losses. In some regions, large areas of rapeseed crops had been damaged, causing farmers to plow them under and replant with winter cereals. The Deutsche Bauernverband, a farmers’ advocacy group, is urging a speedy reversal of the neonicotinoid insecticide ban, warning that without it “rapeseed cultivation will decline significantly in coming years.”

According to Cotton’s Week, “Farmer groups warned of this risk well in advance of the ban but were rebuffed by environmental activists. A Friends of the Earth report declared there would be no threat to OSR crops from the ban and accused the farmer groups and industry scientists of scaremongering.”

It might be different if there was any scientific evidence that the neonicotinoid insecticides are having an impact on bees. University entomologists in the Mid-South have been conducting actual research on the issue and, to date, their studies indicate no measurable impact from the pesticides. Entomologists in the EU would probably find the same to be true in their countries.