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Scientists reluctant to speak up on neonics

Posted Oct. 20th, 2014 by [Robert Arnason](#) 6 Comments

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- Few Canadian toxicologists and environmental scientists are willing to speak up against claims that neonicotinoids kill bees and birds because they are often portrayed as "agents of evil" by the media and other scientists. To join the conversation, include @CdnAg in your tweet, add your thoughts in the comment section at the bottom of the page, or find this story posted on The Western Producer Facebook page.



17:12 Live blog: Scientists reluctant to speak up on neonics

By Robert Arnason

Canadian scientists who believe insecticidal seed treatments are safe aren't contributing to the raging controversy over neonicotinoids because if they stick their neck out, fellow academics and environmental groups will chop off their head.

Last week Ontario's environment minister and the province's commissioner of the environment both made the same statement regarding neonicotinoids, the most widely used class of insecticides in the world. Glen Murray and Gord Miller said neonics are a greater threat to Canada's ecosystem than DDT.

Their quotes prompted a slew of instantaneous media reports with predictable comments from environmental groups, agreeing that neonics are killing bees, poisoning wetlands and killing millions of birds across the country.

Neonics, which are applied as a seed treatment to almost all of the corn and canola in North America and most of the soybeans, have been linked to bee colony losses across U.S. and Canada. In September beekeepers in Ontario filed a \$450 million class action suit against neonicotinoid manufacturers Syngenta and Bayer, claiming production losses dating back to 2006.

University of Saskatchewan research suggests neonics are present at detectable levels in sloughs and wetlands in Western Canada. The neonics are possibly killing insects that come in contact with the water. A lack of insects reduces the food supply for birds that rely on the insects.

Very few, if any, Canadian toxicologists and environmental scientists responded to Miller and Murray's DDT comments. Which is odd, because there is scant scientific

data backing the idea that neonics are a threat to water quality and the wider ecosystem.

Scientists at several Canadian universities, who spoke off the record, explained why they are silent on this issue.

A highly regarded toxicologist said the environmental risks surrounding neonicotinoids are “overstated”. Data indicates that neonics are present in wetlands and other water bodies. But the concentrations are in the parts per trillion, which is essentially nothing.

The true “believers and zealots” hype the neonic risk and use “their research to make an issue where none exists, or make it larger to garner press for the ego and funds for the lab,” a scientist said.

Still, the scientist and others are reluctant to speak up because if they say neonics are safe, fellow researchers and environmental groups launch a venomous assault to destroy their reputation. The neonic issue has become a witch hunt, where anyone who claims pesticides are safe must be burned on a stake.

An environmental scientist said this case is unusual because the attackers are often academics. Research with contrary results and divergent opinion is a normal part of science. But the neonic haters like to send nasty emails and publicly condemn anyone who disagrees with their viewpoint.

The academic environment has become so toxic it’s now difficult to publish papers suggesting neonics don’t kill bees or birds.

A researcher said it’s challenging to find paper reviewers who are neutral on neonics. The majority of reviewers are hostile to insecticide seed treatments, so research showing neonics are safe is highly scrutinized and publication can be delayed. Meanwhile, papers concluding insecticidal seed treatments are killing every bee in Canada are published with minimal vetting.

An entomologist said journalists are not interested in presenting both sides of the issue. Media reports highlight the virtues of the Sierra Club and other groups standing

up for the environment. When defenders of seed treatments appear on television, radio or online, journalists portray them as “Darth Vader” or agents of evil, he said.

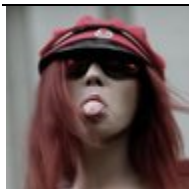
The media reports and the academic chill, assuming there is one, possibly explains the results of a public opinion poll earlier this year. Approximately 87 percent of Ontarians are concerned that neonics are threatening bees and wildlife.

The Ontario government is considering restricting the use of neonicotinoid seed treatments and an outright ban remains a possibility.

No one, including entomologists and environmental scientists, likes having their head chopped off when they dare to speak. But scientists possess the most knowledge and credibility when it comes to insecticides, bees and the wider environment.

It’s been said 10,000 times at Canadian agricultural conferences: the science has to dictate public policy and production practices.

But that maxim is a non-starter, for all of agriculture, if Canadian scientists aren’t willing to speak up.



Norah G Fon · 10 minutes ago Hold on, this is waiting to be approved by The Western Producer.

NORAHG RESPONDS TO SCIENTISTS WHO WORRY ABOUT GETTING BEHEADED BY BEE CONSPIRACY TERRORISTS

Bee conspiracy activists are **COERCING, INTIMIDATING, and TERRORIZING** legitimate and knowledgeable scientists ! Just like the so-called global warming issue, which has now been debunked. Overall, neonicotinoid insecticides do not harm bees. If bee conspiracy activists were not so scientifically illiterate, they would know that scientific research shows that, as reported through EPA’s and Health Canada’s vast toxicology database, no harm will occur to bees. The alleged losses of bees are, in fact, the fault of the bee-keepers and **THEIR** mis-management practices. They are responsible, and **NOT** neonicotinoid insecticides. Their prohibition will not save bees since harming bees with these insecticides is a **MYTH !** Neonicotinoid insecticides cause **NO** harm, and **DO NOT**

harm bees. Researchers have NOT identified a single cause of over-wintering honeybee losses. Moreover, researchers have NOT been able to identify a single cause of bee colony collapse disorder. Under normal field use of neonicotinoid insecticides, the exposure to bees is at very low levels, far too low to cause harmful effects. There is NO evidence to suggest a link between neonicotinoid insecticides and bee colony collapse disorder. Overall, so-called links and causes between bee colony collapse disorder and neonicotinoid insecticides are mere MYTHS ! The weight of the scientific evidence clearly shows that neonicotinoid insecticides DO NOT affect long-term colony health. Overall, neonicotinoid insecticides play a NEGLIGIBLE role compared to diseases, viruses and loss of habitat. Most experts agree that, in recent years, bee colony collapse disorder is the result of a combination of factors, including parasitic mites and diseases. Recent scientific research points toward a combination of parasitic mites (specifically the varroa mite) and pathogens (such as nosema and viral diseases) as main factors. Although some neonicotinoid insecticides are toxic to bees upon direct contact (as are many insecticides), they are used in a way that minimizes any direct exposure to bees, such as seed treatment. Seed treatment insecticides have been used for a decade with almost NO incidences of negative impacts on bees by minimizing potential exposures of non-target insects such as bees. Independent, long-term, controlled field tests have repeatedly shown NO effects on bee losses, weight gain, worker longevity, brood development, honey yield, and over-winter survival relative to bees in areas where treated seed was not used. If we had less conventional neonicotinoid use in the environment, we would still have bee colony collapse disorder, because many bee-keepers are NOT competent to manage their hives. Prohibition will not save bees. <http://tinyurl.com/pxqzh6m> For the whole truth regarding BEES, go to The Pesticide Truths Web-Site ... <http://wp.me/p1jq40-6WJ><http://wp.me/P1jq40-2BA> <http://wp.me/p1jq40-6H8> <http://wp.me/p1jq40-7ty> NORAHG is the National Organization Responding Against HUJE that seek to destroy the Green space and other industries. WILLIAM H GATHERCOLE AND NORAH G Get the latest details at <http://pesticidetruths.com/> <http://pesticidetruths.com/toc...> <http://wp.me/P1jq40-2rr> <https://www.facebook.com/norah...>



ed · 4 days ago

Actually 800 peer reviewed scientific studies carry much more weight than bought off government "scientist" that are hired to protect the corporate industrial complex with our tax dollars. Even the pollen from corn later in the year is killing the bees. Most chemicals in agriculture have a skull and crossbones sign on the box and are to be handled with rubber gloves, a respirator and a full rubber suit. Very bad for human health yet alone little tiny and very sensitive bees. This debate is no contest unless you are not very informed.



RobertWager · 5 days ago

Every single government (from both sides of the Atlantic) scientist I have listened to in the past two years says the same thing. The science implicating neonics in bee issues is weak at best.



richard [RobertWager](#) · 5 days ago

Place yourself in a section of grassland at dusk in August and listen to the symphony of life celebrating another day..... The next evening find yourself in the middle of a section of canola and see if you can find the words to describe the silence of death that deafens your spirit.....Now guess which piece of land has every pore of its vitality systemically infected with the hubris of modern agriculture?



Denise · 5 days ago

The science is clear from the analysis of 800 peer reviewed studies released by the Task Force on Systemic Pesticides--a group of INDEPENDENT scientists, worldwide. They confirm that neonics are a key factor in bee declines and are harming beneficial organisms essential to the functional ecosystems and food production.

Neonicotinoids are damaging soil microbes, butterflies, bees, earthworms, reptiles, and birds. They are calling for immediate regulatory action to restrict neonicotinoids.

The biotech corps and corporate food industries use their own version of "science". Their main objective is to get their product out there in the market ,as fast as they can, and sell as much as they can before their house of cards falls down. Then it's on to the next toxic brew.

Dr. Ray Seidler, former senior scientist at the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) admitted that there 5 toxic chemicals in the blue- coated GM corn seed, used by farmers. It is toxic to everything except the pesticide-resistant crop.

He can speak freely now, as does Dr. Thierry Vrain, former Head of Biotechnology at Agriculture Canada Summerland Research Station, about the dogma and status quo surrounding GMO

technology. They no longer trust the system or the science.
Check out: Task Force on Systemic Pesticides



nicmart · 5 days ago

Strangely, US honey production is up since 2009.

<http://usda.mannlib.cornell.ed...>



ed · 6 days ago

This is not surprising. Just like in the case of the former CWB single desk debate, when the highly thinking vast majority use peer reviewed data to block a corporate, underhanded profit driven destructive "idiotic agenda" they will be labeled the 'tin foil hat decoder crowd' or full moon worshipers. It is not a wonder that most people or scientists as in this case are reluctant to step forward and stop the unnecessary carnage. It quite often does get remedied as the heavy lifting hero's take the fight to the next level and eventually the battle is won as the quiet supporters slowly step back on the scales of justice and over centre the thing. Profit at all cost is nearly always the motivation for these things, wrapped up in a package of suspect math, verbs and adjectives with a proclaimed and deceitful big bow on top. Shame, shame. Ah...Ah..."We didn't really know, but we can all agree that we should put profit first until we do" is the culprits ultimate defense. How would you finance the next debacle if you didn't, right!