Manitoba Co-operator

Health Canada proposes some neonic restrictions

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Health Canada is proposing some restrictions on the use of three neonic pesticides for horticultural production but they would still be registered for use on field crops such as corn and soybeans.

Meanwhile the department will continue working with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the State of California on the impact of the pesticides on pollinators and insects, Health Canada announced Dec. 21.

As for the controversy over their impact on pollinators, Health Canada stands by its earlier conclusion "… that since the introduction of new planting practices for corn and soybeans in 2014, the number of bee death incidents have remained well below the high levels of 2012 and 2013. The number of bee death incidents related to sprayed pesticides also dropped during 2016."

As for population declines in pollinators, "… no single factor has been identified as the cause," it said. "The available science suggests that multiple factors acting in combination may be at play, including loss of habitat and food sources, diseases, viruses and pests, and pesticide exposure."

Health Canada is examining the information collected in an attempt to answer these questions.

Debra Conlon of Grain Farmers of Ontario, said her organization was pleased to see Health Canada appreciate the value of neonic seed treatments and that it "recognizes that there are situations where the use of a neonicotinoid seed treatment would be critical to producing a viable crop." It also "specifically states that the widespread use of these products is contributing to the low soil insect population and that neonics have replaced other less desirable chemistries."

The department also acknowledged that bee "incidents" are down and the best management practices Ontario farmers have instituted are working.

"The report says that since the introduction of a dust-reducing fluency agent for treated corn and soybean seeds in 2014, the number of incident reports associated with treated corn and soybean seeds in Canada has declined by 70 to 90 per cent."

Pierre Petelle, president of CropLife Canada, said the department's announcement validates what the industry has been saying all along. His organization is still analyzing the details of Health Canada's announcement made just before Christmas.

"It will have definite impact on the horticulture sector," Petelle said. "Overall the department is saying it wants to make sure its information on neonics is current but overall pollinators aren't at risk."

He said the department's announcement undercuts the limits imposed by the Ontario government on neonic use. "It shows they got it wrong."

However, the Ontario Beekeepers' Association blasted the department's announcement as a gift to pesticide manufacturers. The decision "goes against overwhelming scientific evidence showing acute and chronic effects on bees, and the experience of Ontario beekeepers whose bees continue to suffer from a decade of overuse of neonicotinoids on soy, corn and winter wheat."

There are three important neonicotinoids currently approved for agricultural use in Canada, imidacloprid, clothianidin, and thiamethoxam. They have been under review since 2012.

The numbers of bee death incidents reported between 2014 and 2017 during the planting period were between 70 and 92 per cent lower, compared to 2013, Health Canada said.

The Pesticide Management Regulatory Agency "continues to track and investigate bee mortality incidents with the support of the appropriate provincial ministry and plans to complete in 2018 a comprehensive analysis of the incidents that occurred between 2012 and 2016."

The agency said as a result of comprehensive scientific assessments of the effects of clothianidin and thiamethoxam on bees and other pollinators, they are proposing to phase out some uses of these pesticides.

"We are also proposing to further restrict other uses in cases where the acceptable risk to bees and other pollinators could not be demonstrated," PMRA wrote. "The PMRA is currently consulting Canadians on these proposed regulatory decisions for 90 days."

The risk assessment for imidacloprid is being reviewed in light of additional data from the registrant, additional literature that has recently been published, and public comments.

"To date, our assessments of the available data and published literature do not point to unacceptable risks to human health from imidacloprid," the department said. The PMRA is also

looking at the potential for neonicotinoids to affect other parts of the environment including aquatic life such as fish, insects, and other organisms.

An environmental risk assessment of it “had showed that, in aquatic environments in Canada, imidacloprid is being measured at levels that are harmful to aquatic insects. These insects are an important part of the ecosystem, including as a food source for fish, birds and other animals. For the protection of the environment, PMRA proposed to phase out all the agricultural and a majority of other outdoor uses of imidacloprid over three to five years.”

The department received about 46,000 comments on that, which it is still reviewing along with additional data from a variety of sources. A final decision on the acceptability of the continued use of imidacloprid in Canada is expected in late 2018.

Proposed decisions for thiamethoxam and clothianidin will be published in mid-2018. So far, the department says clothianidin and thiamethoxam do not pose risks to pollinators and their use will continue on a restricted basis.

A phase-out of foliar application to orchard trees and strawberries as well as municipal, industrial and residential turf sites would be proposed. Pre-bloom application would be reduced from two to one for cucurbit (cucumbers, squash, etc.) vegetables. There would be additional protective label instructions for cereal crop uses.

Proposed changes to the way thiamethoxam can be used include phase-out of foliar and soil applications to ornamental crops that will result in pollinator exposure as well as on berry crops, cucurbit crops and fruiting vegetables and orchard trees. Foliar application to legumes, outdoor fruiting vegetables, and berry crops would no longer be permitted before or during bloom.

As the result of additional information supplied on clothianidin and thiamethoxam products was required, Health Canada is proposing that these products be granted a three-year registration. The risk-reduction measures proposed in these registrations mirror the risk-reduction measures proposed under the re-evaluation while recognizing the other ongoing regulatory activities associated with these products.