

No new major neonic restrictions: Health Canada - Manitoba Co-operator

By Alex Binkley FOLLOW Contributor Published: April 26, 2019 News 0 comments

No new changes are coming to the use of neonicotinoids in Canada.

There will be no new significant restrictions beyond those announced last year, Health Canada said April 10 in its final decision on its review of clothianidin, imidacloprid and thiamethoxam.

The department said it will proceed with cancelling some uses of the products and setting rules on the timing of applications as proposed in 2017 and 2018. However, permitting them for treatment of crop seeds and greenhouse vegetables "... is not expected to pose unacceptable risks to bees and other pollinators."

The re-evaluations of the three products by the Pesticide Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) considered hundreds of scientific studies, from both manufacturers and published literature. Cancellations and new restrictions will be implemented over a two- to three-year period,

Pierre Petelle, CropLife Canada president and CEO, said the decision amounted to a reaffirmation of the safety of the products for seed treatment and many other uses.

"PMRA's re-evaluation decision confirms that in the vast majority of cases, neonics can be used effectively by farmers without unnecessary risk to pollinators," he said.

He added the products have improved agricultural sustainability and limit exposure to non-target organisms through precise applications onto the seed.

However, he added, many farmers, particularly in the horticulture sector will be severely impacted by the restrictions that are coming. "In many cases, there are no viable alternatives to neonics to control certain insect pests and removing neonics for growing certain horticulture crops like apples and cherries may jeopardize the viability of certain types of fruit and vegetable production in Canada," he said.

The Canadian Horticultural Council, which represents fruit and vegetable growers, said farmers are aware of the importance of pollinators.

"Growers do not make decisions that would hurt their pollinators," the organization said in a statement, noting it would work with members to ease the transition period. Most uses on root and tuber vegetables, including potatoes, remain unchanged.

Most changes will come into effect over the next two years while in some cases an additional year is being granted to find workable alternatives to treating pests, CHC said.

It is also watching the general re-evaluation of imidacloprid, and the aquatic invertebrate special reviews of clothianidin and thiamethoxam due out in the next

year.

In 2014, Health Canada implemented risk mitigation measures to help protect bees and other pollinators from exposure to neonicotinoid-contaminated dust that occurs from planting treated seeds. With these risk mitigation measures in place, the number of bee incidents in 2014, 2015 and 2016 were 70 to 80 per cent lower than in 2013.

There has been a continued decline in the number of incidents reported during planting in 2017 and 2018.

“Other factors such as favourable weather conditions might have contributed to the reduction in bee incidents, including deaths,” Health Canada said.

As for population declines in pollinators, “no single factor has been identified as the cause,” the department said in 2018. “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.

The Canadian Federation of Agriculture said PMRA’s approach to clothianidin and thiamethoxan showed major flaws in the re-evaluation and special review process.

“Decisions are increasingly based on overly conservative assumptions and under strict timetables and do not reflect what is happening in the field,” CFA said. “These assumptions put Canadian growers at risk of losing valuable tools to address disease and insect pressures – tools that our international competitors will continue to access.”