

Bayer investigated over insecticides that are killing bees

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Prosecutor Guariniello conducts an investigation into the memory of bees

The family of neonicotinoid insecticides: much valued by corn-farmers, but a deadly killer of bees and other insect species, and therefore sworn enemies of beekeepers, who have been campaigning throughout Italy, for the extension of the ban of products with the active ingredient clothianidin which expires on 31 to October 2011. The temporary ban on the planting of clothianidin-treated corn has lasted since 2008 and from that time beekeepers' fears have lessened. But they have not disappeared, because, although used in smaller doses, the same kind of insecticide is used to protect grape-vines. If clothianidin is allowed to be used again for the planting of maize, this would resurrect the disasters of the early 2000's and threaten the very survival of beekeeping.

The novelty is that Prosecutor Guariniello has quietly, over these years, (like cheese melting over macaroni), conducted an investigation into the causes of the massacre of bees, by sending to the managing directors of: Bayer CropScience in Milan and Syngenta Crop Protection in Italy, warning conclusions of his investigation, for a crime never previously mentioned by magistrates: the spreading of diseases to animals (or plants) which pose a danger for the national economy. Guariniello has charged two managers, from Bayer and Syngenta with these offences, alleging culpability; the penalty, if they are found guilty, ranges from one to five years.

The plant protection product which ended up in the crosshairs of the magistrate is called 'Poncho'. On Bayer's website it is billed as "**the new insecticide for seed treatment of seed corn**". Successfully marketed already, in the United States and other countries, it is very effective against several parasites and is particularly useful against difficult-to-control pests. It kills insects by blocking the transmission of nerve impulses. So they die. Bayer produces it, Syngenta sells it.

Guariniello has collected reports from many beekeepers in the province of Turin and examined pathology analysis from bee post-mortems, which, after 24 hours show no traces of neonicotinoids. So they went further and "field testing" has confirmed the cause and effect relationship between the death of bees and this kind of insecticide.

"Systemic and persistent in the environment, neurotoxic and lethal to many life forms," notes an old report, from the National Union of Italian Beekeepers Associations (Una.Api).

This reveals that his advice - to the layman - is that bees are not contaminated at the time of pollination, but from "lethal doses of the pesticide contained in flying dust from corn fields during planting." For this reason the deadline of October 31st, which may revoke the ban on the insecticide, is a cause for major concern and protests. The planting of corn takes place in the fall.

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