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EPA Finds Neonicotinoid Seed Treatments to Be of Little or No Benefit

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency released a report yesterday that neonicotinoid seed treatments in soybean production provide little or no overall benefits in controlling insects, improving yield or quality in agriculture. This confirms assertions from Beyond Pesticides and others that these chemical treatments are unnecessary and inefficient. Neonicotinoids, widely used in agriculture, have been singled out as the major contributing factor in bee decline.

The report concluded that not only is there no increase in soybean yield when compared to using no pest control at all, but also the potential benefit of neonicotinoid seed treatment is not likely to be large or widespread throughout the U. S. EPA also found that seed treatments fail to provide protection from target pests during critical times of plant activity, ultimately leading to the assessment that “much of the existing usage on soybeans is prophylactic in nature.”

“This report demonstrates, yet again, EPA’s failure in asking the very important question of whether a chemical is truly necessary and efficacious before introducing it into the environment,” says Jay Feldman, executive director of Beyond Pesticides. “And because treated seeds are mostly exempt from federal pesticide laws under the treated article provision, this failure has allowed a dangerous chemical to be used largely unregulated, wreaking havoc on the nation’s pollinators.”

Honey bees and other pollinators have been experiencing a rapid and ongoing population decline in the U.S and other parts of the world since 2006. This has a profound impact on the stability of ecosystems, the economy, and the U.S. food supply. A May 2013 report by USDA found that one in three bites of food depends on pollination, mainly by honey bees, and that pollination is valued at \$20 to \$30 billion annually.

Neonicotinoids have been cited as a primary cause of the pollinator declines by numerous scientific studies, leading to temporary bans of the pesticides in such places as the European Union. Meanwhile in the U.S., environmental groups like Beyond Pesticides and others have challenged neonicotinoid registration and use on several fronts, including lawsuits, petitions, and support of the *Save American Pollinators Act*.

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