
I. Regulatory issues: honey bee risk assessment for pesticides in Europe

Bee health in Europe – Facts & figures. An Opera document

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Abstract

Declines of managed honey bee colonies and also of some wild bee species have been reported by many countries, leading to intensive work and actions in the areas of research and regulations. Declines in pollinating insect numbers can have significant adverse effects ecologically on the diversity of plant species and economically in the productivity of crops. However, up until now, the status and relative importance of the stress factors that may affect bee populations have been relatively unclear and, in many instances, widely disputed.

In this context, OPERA1, has undertaken to produce an updated review on the issue of honey bees and pollinators in Europe, with some highlights to other continents, which would cover ecological and economical aspects related to these species in relation to agriculture.

The expert invited have gathered the latest information available on the factors influencing the health of both managed honeybees and populations of native wild bees, including solitary bees and bumble bees. The main conclusions indicate that the honey bee can cohabitate with modern agricultural practices provided necessary precautions are taken to maintain viable food resources for bees and avoiding practices that may cause adverse effects. These precautions include the design of agricultural landscapes and the implementation of practices that account for the presence of pollinators. Essential developments also concern the availability of effective and regulated veterinary compounds to help beekeepers eradicate the most important pests from apiaries. An analysis of beekeeping activity in its economical context is also provided. Finally, modern agriculture and beekeeping demands better technical knowledge and a critical lack of training and communication to better accompany the updates in science and technology to the farm and the field is identified. The case of wild bees may be considered to be very similar to that of the domesticated honey bee albeit far less well documented.

Recommendations are emitted towards all those involved in agriculture, bee keeping regulatory authorities and research, which should be communicated to all as the effectiveness of the actions will rely on their common effort to implement them.

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