

"Nicotine Bees" Population Restored With Neonicotinoids Ban

by Roberta Cruger, Los Angeles on 05.15.10

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Bee barely hangs on before collapsing. Photo by [Operaticomnivore](#)

Following France and Germany, last year the Italian Agriculture Ministry suspended the use of a class of pesticides, nicotine-based neonicotinoids, as a "precautionary measure." The compelling results - restored bee populations - prompted the government to uphold the ban. Yesterday, copies of the film '[Nicotine Bees](#)' were delivered to the US Congress explaining the pesticide's connection to [Colony Collapse Disorder](#). Despite the evidence, why does CCD remain a 'mystery' in the US?

Trailer for "Nicotine Bees" documentary explaining cause for Colony Collapse Disorder.

Nicotinyl pesticides, containing clothianidin, thiametoxam and imidacloprid, used to coat plant seeds, are released into the lymph as a permanent insecticide inside the plant. But after just sucking dew from maize leaves that absorbed neonicotinoids, disoriented bees can't find their way to the apiary. Massive numbers of bees get lost and die.

In 2009, Italy's neonicotinoid-free corn sowing resulted in no cases of widespread bee mortality in apiaries around the crops. This had not happened since 1999. The European Research Center, [Youris](#), reported that Moreno Greatti, from the University of Udine stated, "Bee hives have not suffered depopulation and mortality coinciding with maize sowing this year. Beekeepers from Northern Italy and all over the country are unanimous in recognizing that the suspension of neonicotinoid- and fipronil-coated maize seeds."

Although varroasis (infections from mites) and other pathologies are found at other times of the year, suspending neurotoxic insecticides improved the situation significantly. Francesco Panella, President of the Italian Association of Beekeepers, says: "On behalf of beegrowers working in a countryside dominated by maize crops, I wrote to the Minister of Agriculture to confirm the great news, for once: thanks to the suspension of the bee-killing seed coating, the hives in the Po Valley are flourishing again."

Not true in Southern Italy, where bee mortality was high in citrus groves, which were sprayed with neonicotinoids, also used in vineyards and other crops. The new law has been challenged by the agrochemical industry but the Italian government upheld the ban.

Want to eat?

With pollination responsible for one-third of our food supply, the loss of 30% of our bee population prompted the [Pollinator Protection Campaign](#) by the [Sierra Club](#). It bought 333 copies of [Nicotine Bees](#) which were delivered to Congress on May 13 and 14, along with 50 more from the filmmakers, with a letter from the National Honey Bee Advisory Board. The American Beekeeping Federation and American Honey Producers Association are asking Congress to stop the threats from systemic pesticides to food supplies, honeybees and pollinators. Send a copy to the other 152 members of Congress by contacting the [Sierra Club's bee campaign](#).

The [bees steep decline](#) in 2005 and 2006 was catastrophic around the world. In the [UK bee numbers](#) have been halved over 20 years, with reasons including the pesticide and warmer winters due to climate change. Honeybee pollinated fruit trees and crops in Britain amount to £165m annually, so a campaign to grow bees in city gardens and roofs has been an attempt to halt decline.

Despite the scientific data, reports still claim the reason for the bee crisis is unclear, even blaming cell phones. So what's really holding up the banning of neonicotinoids? As a beekeeper in the documentary says, "A fifth grader can figure this out."