April 30, 2013

For Immediate Release

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Bee City USA Applauds EU's Ban

Three cheers for the European Union! On April 29, 2013, something momentous happened. The European Union passed a two-year ban on three neonicitinoid pesticides considered harmful to honey bees as well as many wild pollinators. This ban applies to all 27 EU countries, restricting the use of three specific pesticides (imidacloprid, clothianidin, and thiamethoxam) on flowering crops on which the bees forage.

For several years beekeepers and environmentalists have been asking national governments in Europe and the United States to ban at least some pesticides classified as neonicitinoids, because they are believed to seriously harm bees and threaten our food supply as a result. In the United States, they have been asking the Environmental Protection Agency to conduct its own tests of these pesticides rather than relying on the results provided by their manufacturers.

Neonicotinoids ("neonics") have been called insect nerve agents. Research shows that they interfere with honey bees' ability to navigate and taste, which are crucial to foraging for food and returning to the hive.

According to a 2012 report by the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation, *Are Neonicotinoids Killing Bees?*, "Neonicotinoids are systemic chemicals; they are absorbed by the plant and are transferred through the vascular system, making the plant itself toxic to insects." Even more troublesome, neonics "persist in the soil and in the plants for very long periods of time." In the case of woody plants, that can be many years. Many native pollinators—especially solitary bees, butterflies, and moths, nest in trees or use elements of trees for nesting materials. In short, even one application may not only be absorbed unintentionally by surrounding plants, but also plants that come into contact with the soil for years to come. Toxins accumulate in pollen and nectar with each subsequent application and along with their

pollen and nectar, bees take the toxins home with them for storage and feeding their young--if they are lucky enough to find their way home.

Introduced in the mid-1990s, today neonics are nearly ubiquitous, despite the fact that France banned neonics on corn, sunflowers, and canola in 2000 after beekeepers demanded action. Neonic pesticides coat the seeds of most of the soybeans and corn grown in the United States. They appear in everything from seeds used for small and large–scale agriculture to common lawn and garden and household products.

As we focus attention on large agriculture, we also need to look in our own backyards. According to the Xerces report, "Products approved for home and garden use may be applied to ornamental and landscape plants, as well as turf, at significantly higher rates (potentially 120 times higher) than those approved for agricultural crops." Recently the Center for Food Safety and Beyond Pesticides launched their joint *Bee Protective Campaign* to make the public aware of neonics' use in fertilizers, flower care, mite control, and insecticides for turf, fruits, vegetables, trees, and shrubs.

A two-year respite may give EU beekeepers enough time to demonstrate the detrimental effect neonics have been having on honey bees. Let's hope that the scientific community will produce studies during that time that will settle the debate over whether neonicotinoids are killing honey bees once and for all.

Last year, a group of concerned beekeepers in Asheville, North Carolina, launched ***Bee City USA***™ to encourage cities to become pollinator friendly in their planning, plantings, and pesticide use. Bee City USA invites cities to apply for designation as a Bee City USA, and individuals to take the Xerces Society's Pollinator Protection Pledge:

"To Bring Back the Pollinators, I will:

1. Grow a variety of bee-friendly flowers that bloom from spring through fall.
2. Protect and provide bee nests and caterpillar host plants.
3. Avoid using pesticides, especially insecticides.
4. Talk to my neighbors about the importance of pollinators and their habitat."

A program of the Center for Honeybee Research, Bee City USA, is making the world safer for pollinators, one city at a time. Learn more at www.beecityusa.org.

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