

Pollinator Protection Activities Update

May 20-21, 2020 Pesticide Program Dialogue Committee Meeting

Background:

- Pollinator protection is a priority for the EPA. Pollinator species are important providers of ecosystem services and successful food production.
- EPA conducts pollinator risk assessments to support regulatory decisions for new and existing pesticides using the best available science. To ensure that it has the best available science for these assessments, the Agency has developed guidance to help identify additional data that may be appropriate or needed and to outline review methods for assessing impacts to beneficial insects (*i.e.*, honey bees).
- While the number of managed honey bee colonies has been increasing in the U.S. since the mid-1990s, 9-yr average annual colony losses are at approximately 38% while the 13-year average overwintering losses are at roughly 29% nationally. These losses underscore the level of effort required by beekeepers to maintain colony numbers.
- The current understanding is that a complex set of interacting stressors have contributed to declines in honey bee health, including loss of habitat, parasites and disease, genetics, poor nutrition, bee management practices, and pesticide exposure. Although no single factor has been identified as the main cause, varroa mites and the viruses they vector are considered to be major factors in the declines in bee health.
- With the goal of supporting pollinators broadly, the EPA is addressing these issues on three fronts: (1) improving the science for assessing risk of pesticides to honey bees; (2) advancing management initiatives to mitigate potential exposure of bees to pesticides; and, (3) fast-tracking the registration process for pesticides intended to control varroa mites.

Managed Pollinator Protection Plans (MP3s):

- EPA is working with the states and tribes on pollinator protection plans which are intended to increase communication and cooperation between stakeholders to reduce exposure of bees to pesticides. For the most part, these are not regulatory programs but instead rely on voluntary efforts at the local level so that different communities and groups may work together and coordinate efforts.
- Plans can also include elements designed to enhance habitat for bees other than honey bees (*i.e.*, social and solitary non-*Apis* bees) and other pollinators.
- The American Association of Pesticide Control Officers (AAPCO) completed its initial survey, of state lead agencies evaluating the effectiveness of MP3s toward reducing exposure of bees to pesticides, as recommended in 2017 by the Pesticide Program Dialogue Committee (PPDC) “pollinator protection plan metrics workgroup.” The survey is planned to be conducted biennially. In February 2020, the Office of Pesticide Programs (OPP) presented to the AAPCO national meeting its strategy to utilize AAPCO survey data as a line of evidence for evaluating the efficacy of MP3s at a national level.

Key Goals and Next Steps Concerning Pollinators:

- Review and respond to public comments submitted on the neonicotinoid pollinator risk assessments and Proposed Interim Decisions that were published in January 2020¹, and complete the Interim Decisions for these active ingredients.
- The AAPCO survey data serve as one line of evidence with which OPP will assess the national impact of efforts to mitigate potential exposure of pollinators to pesticides.
 - Survey results identified three main focus areas that states/tribes have indicated for continued improvement as a result of their efforts to protect pollinators: 1) expanding the scope of MP3s, 2) updating training manuals to include methods to protect pollinators, and 3) enhance bee kill incident reporting.
- Continue to promote pollinator health and serve as a resource to those interested in pollinator protection.
- Continue to interact, engage, and communicate with states/tribal nations about ongoing pollinator efforts through attendance and discussions at meetings and teleconferences (e.g., State FIFRA Issues Research Evaluation Group (SFIREG) full committee meeting, June 1-2, 2020).
- Develop/execute a pollinator webinar series to address: 1) improving habitat (*Creating Monarch Habitats in Schools and Communities* March 2020), 2) advancing the science of assessing risks to bees from pesticides, 3) engaging stakeholders, and 4) mitigating risks.
- Coordinate with USDA to host USDA/EPA State of the Pollinator Science Workshop.
- Work toward advancing critical policy goals to promote the health of honeybees and other pollinators.

¹ <https://www.epa.gov/pollinator-protection/schedule-review-neonicotinoid-pesticides>