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# Who speaks for the bees?

**By Skid Crease**

Well, it appears that my comments about neonicotinoids, or neonics, ruffled a few feathers in the agri-business community. It seems that environmental literacy is all well and good until it affects our jobs, income and lifestyles.

The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture is following the lead of the European Union and calling for a moratorium on the use of neonics. This does not appear to sit well with CropLife Canada and The Grain Farmers of Ontario who are opposing that moratorium.

CropLife Canada would like you to believe that their misleading and factually incorrect paper horribly titled, ?Bees Matter,? is the word, the truth and the light on how safe and beneficial this chemical is. A more careful reading, however, according to investigative reporter Catherine Porter, reveals that it is full of cleverly selected, out of context, and false data carefully chosen to sell the fairy tale that all is well in neonics land.

To get the real science and facts, we have to turn to The Task Force on Systemic Pesticides (TFSP), and their summary report based on over 800 papers published by practicing, published, and peer-reviewed scientists. Here is their conclusion:

?Neocotinoids and fipronil, neonics, have impacts that extend far beyond the intended crop, plant and pest species. They are causing significant damage and pose a series risk of harm to a wide range of beneficial invertebrate species in soil, vegetation, aquatic and marine habitats and are affecting ecosystem services as a result.

The risk of harm occurs at field exposure levels (ie. the amounts used in agriculture) and lower. It is clear that present day levels of pollution with neonics resulting from authorized uses, frequently exceed ?lowest observed effect concentrations' for a wide range of non-target species and are thus likely to have large scale and wide ranging negative biological and ecological impacts.

The evidence is also clear that neonics pose a serious risk of harm to honey bees and other pollinators.?

As well, in the July 2014 issue of the journal Nature, a Dutch study demonstrated that the level of neonicotinoids detected in environmental samples correlated strongly with the decline in populations of insect-eating birds. Ernesto Guzman, renowned Canadian researcher from the University of Guelph, says that neonics are 20 times stronger than DDT, a pesticide that was banned over 20 years ago.

Now, the CropLife Canada website says this: A crop protection product should be used only when necessary ? using the right tool at the right time, in the right place and in the right way.

Only when necessary? Jeff Leal, the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs agrees: ?We are committed to working with stakeholders to develop a system that targets the use of neonicotinoid-treated seed only to areas or circumstances where there is demonstrated need.?

Neonics can be sprayed on crops or used as a seed coating. They are water soluble and will leach into the soil and eventually into the nearest watershed or aquifer. If the seeds are planted at high speed, the neonics residue mixes with the dust and becomes airborne. Whether seed coated or sprayed, it is absorbed into every part of every plant into which it comes in contact well beyond soybean, corn, and canola seeds.

The misinformation campaign about neonics is astounding. CropLife Canada and the Grain Farmers of Ontario recently financed a Conference Board of Canada Report to show how devasting the elimination of neonics would be to the Ontario economy, and how little it was really bothering those bees that matter.

Beekeepers didn't buy it, and launched a lawsuit against the two chemical companies who profit the most from their production and sales of neonicotinoids in Canada ? Bayer CropScience and Syngenta AG. Beekeepers claim the pesticides have caused widespread bee deaths that have driven up costs and reduced honey production, and that the companies were ?negligent? in the ?design, sale manufacture and distribution? of neonicotinoid pesticides.

I only have to look as far as my November 2014 issue of Ontario Grain Farmer to find an article on the joys of high speed planting, under the cliché, ?time is money.? Thankfully, it is balanced with an article on planter deflectors to reduce ?the amount of off-field dust generated during the planting of neonicotinoid treated corn and soybean seeds.? That same issue also contains an article on ?Responsible use of neonicotinoids: research to protect pollinators,? part of the Growing Forward 2 federal-provincial-territorial initiative.

When I open the first page of my February 2015 issue of Better Farming, I find the first ad is from Bayer CropScience for their winter fungicide, StrategoPro. While it is not a neonic, StrategoPro is typical of the chemicals Bayer has been making since it graduated from the IG Farben group after World War II.

From their own safety sheet for StrategoPro comes this warning: ?TOXIC to aquatic organisms and non-target terrestrial plants. Observe buffer zones.?
It is always good to read the directions. The safety sheets for neonics also have directions. In Wisconsin, they now have a ?pollinator protection box? on all insecticides toxic to bees. The instructions read: ?Do not apply this product while bees are foraging. Do not apply this product until flowering is complete and all petals have fallen unless the following condition has been met: notification of beekeepers.?
In Wisconsin, bees really do matter.

Skid Crease is an award-winning outdoor and environmental educator, a keynote speaker, a storyteller, an author, and a community volunteer. He taught with the North York and Toronto District School boards for 35 years, and officially ?retired? from the Faculty of Education, York University, where he was a Course Director and Environmental Science Advisor. Skid has worked with scientists from Environment Canada (pre-2005), NASA, and the Hadley Centre for Climate Prediction and Research in a quest to put an understandable story behind the wealth of their scientific data.