

Sent: Tuesday, May 05, 2009 10:18 PM

Subject: Re: FARMING TODAY GETS ITS OWN BEEHIVE AND DEBATES IMPACT OF NEO-NICOTINOIDS ON BEES

Hi Graham and All

I presume that the programme had a 'very good opening debate' simply because it gave you ammunition for your campaign and quoted the people you wanted it to quote?

I agree that there is a theoretical risk that bees can be directly poisoned or even disorientated by insecticides. However, the circumstantial evidence on neonicotinoids in the UK points in the other direction - bees do not suffer more in OSR regions than elsewhere, and bee losses are mostly in winter when contamination from OSR ought to be long flushed out of the system.

I challenged you recently on one of the internet fora where you publish this kind of message and you haven't given me an adequate reply. So, I'll ask you again: Given that by far the greatest exposure of bees to neonicotinoids will be from OSR (now from seed mostly dressed with imidacloprid), why are bee colonies thriving as usual during April and May in OSR areas (as mine are now), yet the losses are mostly in winter? Is that in any way compatible with your view that these compounds are damaging bees?

Please try to apply a little logic to the issue. Of course arable areas are generally poor for bees, and forested upland ones are ideal for bees. The forage available in intensive arable areas is usually scarce, highly seasonal, and possibly nutritionally unbalanced. Move up the hills into the forests and you have a great diversity of forage and inevitably healthier bees. Is that not obvious?! Similarly, the difference between UK intensive agricultural land and urban and suburban London, as mentioned on another programme, is likely to be due to the diversity and continuity of the forage on offer surely?

The Soil Association article you cite says:

'This has been recognised by other European governments, but in the UK, with one of the least effective systems of pesticide safety in Europe, official advice is that Neonicotinoids are 'safe' to use.'

This slur on our regulators is wishful thinking again, isn't it?! Why are the UK pesticide people so poor? Compared to the US, where pesticides seem to be thrown about with gay abandon (and shocking levels of imidacloprid are found in bee-pollinated trees), our authorities seem to have approvals under control. Official advice is indeed that they are safe if used correctly. I recall pointing you to a review of all published data on neonicotinoids where the Bonmatin work you like to quote (and which some journalists are now taking up) is recognised as being out on a limb and also flawed.

Most beekeepers I've discussed this with think that poor availability of forage, two poor summers in a row and Varroa together with imperfect Varroa control the viruses they transmit are the main issues affecting bees. In some parts of the country perhaps you could add Nosema or other diseases to this list. By distracting beekeepers from these likely causes, you may be doing beekeepers and beekeeping a great disservice.

If you intend to circulate a riposte to this message, please try to keep it polite. Your aggressive response last summer lost you a great deal of respect.

best wishes

Gavin