



Backgrounder:

Canadian Seed Industry Takes Further Steps to Mitigate Risk to Pollinators

December 12, 2014

What has the seed industry done to date?

CSTA's member companies are stewards of seed and the technology that seed carries. We take our role very seriously and understand that we have a responsibility to ensure that seed and seed technology are used in a way that contributes to an abundant and safe food supply, a vibrant agricultural economy and a healthy environment.

The seed industry has undertaken considerable efforts to mitigate risk to pollinators while ensuring that Canadian growers have access to the technologies that they need to produce food in a safe, sustainable and environmentally friendly way.

In May 2012, CSTA facilitated the creation of a '*Seed Applied Insecticide and Pollinator Health Value Chain Coalition*'. The industry led coalition brings together grower groups, developers, applicators, marketers and users of seed treatments and treated seed who are committed to maintaining the highest possible standards for the development, application and use of all crop production inputs, including neonicotinoid seed treatments. The Coalition sent a formal letter to the Federal and Provincial Ministers' of Agriculture and the Environment letter in August, 2013 that outlined the Canadian agriculture industry's commitment to working with the entire value chain and our federal and provincial regulators to find a workable solution to ensuring pollinator health.

CSTA and our members have undertaken 6 key initiatives to help ensure that pollinators and the environment are protected and that farmers are able to continue to access the tools that they need to grow the crops that Canadian's rely on for food, fuel and fiber.

- 1) Promotion of Best Practices (BMPs):** BMPs for planting treated seed known as '*Pollinator Protection: Reducing Risk from Treated Seed*' were developed by the Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) of Health Canada in the fall of 2013.

Since their creation CSTA members have broadly distributed the BMPs to their value chain partners and spent considerable time and resources educating and training their staff and retailer and grower customers on the importance of following the steps outlined in the BMPs. CSTA created several communication pieces and presentations for use by our members during grower meetings and at product launches.

- 2) Additional Labeling:** CSTA's members worked with the federal regulators at PMRA to develop new labeling for corn and soybeans that have been treated with neonicotinoids. The additional labeling was not scheduled to be implemented until 2015; however CSTA member companies exceeded the regulated requirements by adding the new PMRA labeling to neonicotinoid treated corn and soybeans for the 2014 season. The additional labeling appeared on all pallet IDs, was placed in the sleeve/pocket of all bulk containers and polywoven bags and appeared on invoices.

- 3) Improved Technology:** Substantial resources went into distributing, educating, promoting and training on the mandatory use of Bayer's new seed flow Fluency Agent when planting neonicotinoid treated corn and soybeans. This new Fluency Agent significantly reduces the dust generated during planting and was adopted by nearly every grower for the 2014 planting season. Seed companies had never distributed seed flow lubricants before but did so in the spirit of stewardship.

Resources have also been dedicated to developing new polymers that cover the seed preventing the seed treatment from rubbing off. There are also deflector kit trials underway which significantly reduce the emissions generated by planters, further reducing the chance of bees and other pollinators from coming into contact with dust.

- 4) Lifecycle Stewardship:** Additional standards for the handling, storage, use and disposal of treated seed are being developed, and will be enforced by the industry. CSTA is also working to ensure that our products are disposed of responsibly. CSTA partnered with CleanFARMS, a not-for-profit industry stewardship organization, which is running a seed bag and pesticide container collection pilot project in over 200 locations in Ontario and Quebec in 2015.
- 5) Giving Farmers Choice:** CSTA members will continue to ensure that farmers have access to a range of products including untreated seed, fungicide-only treated seed, and seed treated with fungicides and insecticides. More treatment options were offered in 2014 than ever before on more hybrids in different maturity zones. The choice of seed treatment options will continue to be customer driven.
- 6) Working Collaboratively:** CSTA staff and members are fully committed to continuing to work with all relevant stakeholders. CSTA was an active participant at the Ontario Bee Health Working Group and is very involved at the federal level with the establishment of a National Bee Health Roundtable that is co-chaired by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the Canadian Honey Council.

CSTA and its members are committed to working together with the value chain, including farmers, regulators and policy makers to reduce the dust generated during planting to ensure the safe planting of insecticide treated seed. We are actively educating and training those who choose to use insecticide treated seed, to ensure that it is being used in a safe and responsible manner. We recognize and appreciate that industry has a role to play in mitigating risk to pollinators from treated seed.

What's next?

CSTA and our corn and soybean members have been working diligently to take additional industry action to further mitigate risk to pollinators while continuing to utilize modern agriculture technologies. CSTA, in consultation with the Canadian Honey Council, decided to take action to reduce the amount of insecticide used on corn and soybean seed.

As an industry, in collaboration with our apiculture colleagues, while continuing to offer untreated and fungicide only treatment options we will also be reducing treatment rates, thereby significantly reducing the overall amount of active ingredient used in corn and soybean seed treatments. These changes will come into force over a two year phased in period as seed companies typically grow and treat corn and soybean seed in one year to sell in the next year.

By reducing the application rate of seed applied insecticides and introducing more fungicide only options this industry lead program is estimated to result in a reduction in the pesticide load in Ontario and Quebec in 2015 by 15% in corn and 9% in soybeans. In 2016 the reduction will climb to 31% in corn and 18% in soybeans. This is a significant step forward that recognizes the importance of both the agriculture and apiculture industries as being complimentary and interdependent. The province of

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Ontario will see the greatest reduction in insecticide use through this initiative as it is the province with the largest acreage of corn and soybeans.

Manitoba will also see a significant reduction in pesticide use as well, with a 15% pesticide reduction in corn in 2015 and a 24% reduction in corn in 2016. Soybeans in Manitoba are more difficult to accurately capture as most of the seed is treated at the retail level in the spring just before planting. However, we are confident that there will be sizeable reduction in pesticide use on soybeans as well in the province.

Conclusion

The seed industry is committed to an ongoing dialogue and continued action to find sustainable solutions for our industry, the Canadian economy, and the health of our environment. The stewardship initiatives undertaken by CSTA and our value chain partners are paying off. On November 25th, the same day the Government of Ontario announced drastic measures to reduce the use of neonicotinoids, PMRA released preliminary results of its bee health monitoring project which concluded that to date ***'Health Canada's PMRA does not have sufficient information to draw conclusions regarding a link between these colony effects and potential neonicotinoid exposure.'*** PMRA's scientific work found that the number of bee death incidents reported during planting in Canada was down by 70% in 2014 compared to 2013. In Ontario the number of incidents reported during planting was down even further, by 79% in 2014 compared by 2013.

CSTA urges both federal and provincial policy makers to remain steadfast in their support of science as the foundation for regulatory and trade decisions. Sound scientific principles are measurable and reproducible. Regulatory assessments and approval process based on science ensure that all products are assessed consistently, giving confidence to consumers and to the developers of innovation. It is also important that regulatory agencies are clearly instructed to remain focused on science.

For more information:

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