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April 14, 2016

Michael Goodis
Acting Director, Pesticide Re-Evaluation Division
Office of Pesticide Programs
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Docket Center (EPA/DC), (28221T)
1200 Pennsylvania, Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20460-0001

**RE: Imidacloprid Registration Review; Draft Pollinator Ecological Risk Assessment;
Notice of Availability; Docket # EPA-HQ-OPP-2008-0844; FR:-9940-82**

Dear Mr. Goodis:

On behalf of the Agricultural Retailers Association (ARA) I am submitting comments regarding the Imidacloprid Registration Review; Draft Pollinator Ecological Risk Assessment. ARA supports the continued availability and use of these products for the nation's agricultural industry as they are effective crop protection products that can be safely applied without affecting commercial honey bee populations or other native pollinators.

Statement of Interest

ARA is a not-for-profit trade association that represents America's agricultural retailers and distributors. ARA members provide goods and services to farmers and ranchers which include: fertilizer, crop protection chemicals, seed, crop scouting, soil testing, custom application of pesticides and fertilizers, and development of comprehensive nutrient management plans. Retail and distribution facilities are scattered throughout all 50 states and range in size from small family-held businesses or farmer cooperatives to large companies with multiple outlets.

Comments

In today's globally competitive agricultural industry, it is very important that agricultural retailers and their farmer customers have access to modern technologies like imidacloprid that are critical tools for integrated pest management (IPM) programs. ARA is an active member of the Honey Bee Health Coalition (HBHC), a diverse public-private partnership focused on collaborative solutions to improve the health of honey bees and other pollinators in the context of productive agricultural systems and thriving ecosystems. ARA members fully understand the importance of healthy pollinators and the key role they play in the production of agricultural crops. However, it has been proven that these types of products can be used safely without adversely impacting pollinators.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) website, "The Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) provides for federal regulation of pesticide distribution, sale, and use. All pesticides distributed or sold in the United States must be registered (licensed) by EPA. Before EPA may register a pesticide under FIFRA, the applicant must show, among other things, that using the pesticide according to specifications "will not generally cause unreasonable adverse effects on the environment." FIFRA defines the term "unreasonable adverse effects on the environment" to mean: "(1) any unreasonable risk to man or the environment, taking into account the economic, social, and environmental costs and benefits of the use of any pesticide, or (2) a human dietary risk from residues that result from a use of a pesticide in or on any food inconsistent with the standard under section 408 of the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act."

Very stringent regulatory safeguards are in place to ensure that no crop protection products or crops posing an unacceptable risk to plant or animal life are allowed on the market. According to a March 2016 Phillips-McDougal report on "Agrochemical Research and Development", a new pesticide takes on average almost 11.3 years to research and develop. In addition, the new product typically requires over 120 separate studies before gaining approval to go on the market. Imidacloprid and other crop protection products can clearly be toxic to bees if used incorrectly and not in accordance with the FIFRA approved label. For example, in Australia reports show that honey bee populations are not in decline and pesticides are not a highly significant issue, even though they are clearly toxic to bees if used incorrectly. There have been reported incidents of bee deaths in Australia as a result of agricultural pesticides use but arises due to a break-down in communication between the farmer, beekeeper, and applicator.

There are many vocal opponents of crop protection products who do not understand modern agriculture or the importance of neonics to current IPM practices. Nor do they seem to care that these products have helped reduce potential exposures to pollinators by reducing the use of broad-spectrum sprays once needed to control harmful pests. Considering the lack of bee incidents associated with most farm operations and the fact that many crops do not need bees for pollination, additional restrictions on neonics seems like a solution in search of a problem.

Most uses of imidacloprid have a very low risk potential to bees as indicated from the preliminary report. However, the actions being taken by EPA seem to be an effort to appease anti-pesticide groups while providing incomplete information to the general public that only serves to create a growing divide between America's agricultural industry and consumers. Before EPA finalizes this report or make any additional recommendations, ARA requests the agency seek the involvement of agricultural retailers and their farmer customers as they are the most directly impacted by any final decision. A one-size-fits-all label change or arbitrary restrictions on certain crops will only hurt agriculture and will not improve honey bee or native pollinator health. If there are common-sense, cost-effective ways to ensure greater protections for commercial honey bees and native pollinators located on agricultural land ARA can likely support it, but our industry needs flexibility and reasonable options that do not undermine successful pest management practices. For example, ARA believes commercial beekeepers should be required to register with their state agency and provide their hive locations so the applicator and farmer are aware of this information before making any pesticide applications. This one simple solution would help mitigate any accidental bee deaths and improve communication efforts between all key parties within the agricultural industry.

ARA strongly encourages EPA to consider state-supported Managed Pollinator Protection Plans (MP3s), adoption of best management practices, or bee-box restrictions that would better

address the needs of applicators, farmers, and commercial beekeepers. There is significant progress being made in the states to establish these MP3s. Any effort to take away successful crop protection tools such as imidacloprid could undermine those efforts. Commercial applicators, farmers and beekeepers have worked together successfully for decades. Our industry agrees that crops must be protected and know there are many ways to cooperate with commercial beekeepers without incident. It is unfair for EPA to place all of the responsibility and blame of honey bee deaths on the nation's agricultural industry. There are a host of factors contributing to bee deaths, which pesticides is only a small part of a much larger picture impacting honey bee health such as the Varroa mite, lack of forage, stress, and poor hive management.

Conclusion

ARA supports the use of risk-based assessments in understanding factors that may impact honey bee and native pollinator health. We believe EPA needs to use widely accepted, peer-reviewed science and methodologies as it relates to any preliminary pollinator assessment for imidacloprid or other critical agricultural pesticide products. The key to any short-term and long-term solution to improve pollinator health is through a diverse public-private partnership that brings together all impacted segments such as agribusinesses, farmers, commercial beekeepers, government agencies, conservation groups, manufacturers, and food processors.

ARA believes efforts by the HBHC and MP3s is where EPA and state pesticide control officials should focus their attention and provide support if we hope to have successful, collaborative solutions to improve pollinator health and continue to provide essential tools for a productive and globally competitive American agricultural industry. We hope that going forward EPA will follow the scientific data regarding pollinator health, generally, and the findings in the imidacloprid pesticide policy risk assessment, in particular.

Best regards,



Richard D. Gupton
Senior Vice President, Public Policy & Counsel