

# **AB 1789 (Williams)**

## **Bee Colony Losses and Pesticide Review**

### **SUMMARY**

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AB 1789 would provide a timeline to the Department of Pesticide Regulation to complete its current reevaluation of neonicotinoid compounds.

### **BACKGROUND**

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Honey bees are the most economically valuable pollinator worldwide, pollinating key agricultural crops, as well as backyard vegetables and flowers. In California, the almond industry wholly relies on bees for pollination and is currently valued at over \$3 billion. Honey bees are vital to the pollination of many other of California's crops which are critical to our national food system and essential to the economy of the state.

One in three bites of food Americans eat relies on bees, and the bee population is declining at an unprecedented rate, posing a threat to backyard gardeners and agricultural operations alike. Annual colony losses from 2006-2011 averaged about 33% each year, more than double what is considered sustainable, according to the United States Department of Agriculture.

After having tried and failed to link colony losses with a single root cause, scientists now largely agree that a combination of factors is to blame. These include lack of varied forage and nutrition, pathogens and pests such as the Varroa mite, and chronic and acute exposure to a variety of pesticides, all of which in combination may lead to less robust immunity allowing diseases and pests normally combated to take hold.

Neonicotinoids are the most widely used class of insecticides. They are systemic pesticides typically applied as a soil drench and taken up through the plant's vascular system which accesses all parts of the plant, including pollen and nectar, and can persist for months in the environment.

Based on data submitted to the Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) showing a potential hazard to honey bees, DPR initiated a reevaluation process for four neonicotinoid compounds in 2009: imidacloprid, thiamethoxam, clothianidin, and dinotefuran. DPR has required manufacturers to submit studies monitoring neonicotinoid residues in pollen, nectar, and leaf

samples in a variety of plant species including citrus, melons, strawberries, stone fruit, almonds, and cucurbits (melons) among others. Additionally, registrants have been required to conduct acute toxicity studies on honey bee larvae. Five years after the start of the reevaluation, there have been several rounds of studies requested. Some studies are currently under review at DPR, and others are in the midst of being conducted, but there is no proposed end date in sight.

### **THE BILL**

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AB 1789 addresses just one of the many issues that may be affecting honey bee populations. The bill provides DPR with a timeline to complete the reevaluation of neonicotinoid compounds initiated in 2009. Specific milestones are:

- a date certain to issue a proposed decision
- a 30-day to 6-month period for public comment
- a date certain by which to finalize the decision and implement any mitigation measures

AB 1789 is needed to provide DPR with a clear timeframe by which to complete the reevaluation process and suggest appropriate steps moving forward. Without such a timeline, the process may continue indefinitely.

A conclusion to this reevaluation, decided by experts with input from all parties, will ensure swift and appropriate action independent of the findings of the studies. If neonicotinoids are found to contribute to bee colony losses, mitigation measures will be implemented in a timely manner. If they are found not to be a contributing factor, time and resources may be spent investigating other causes. In either case, this is a question of the best use of State resources.

Honey bees are critical to maintaining our diverse food supply and essential contributors to the agricultural economy of California. It is important that California efficiently focus efforts to aid in the overall protection of honey bee health.

## **SUPPORT**

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- Santa Barbara Beekeepers Association (sponsor)
- Pesticide Action Network of North America
- Pollinator Stewardship Council
- California State Grange
- Center for Food Safety
- Ecological Farming Association
- Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides
- Friends of the Earth U.S.

## **OPPOSITION**

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- None on file

## **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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