

# Neonics pose low risk for honeybees, WSU says

By DAN WHEAT  
Capital Press

RICHLAND, Wash. — A class of pesticides that has been linked to colony collapse disorder of honeybees may not be as much of a culprit as thought.

Neonicotinoid pesticides, sometimes called neonics, are neuro-active insecticides chemically similar to nicotine. One of them, imidacloprid, is the most widely used insecticide in the world.

Compared to organophosphates and carbamates, neonics cause less toxicity in birds and mammals than in insects.

While neonics can harm honeybees, a new study by Washington State University researchers shows they pose little risk to bees in real-world settings.

A team of WSU entomologists studied apiaries, collections of beehives, in urban, rural and agricultural areas in Washington looking for potential honeybee colony exposure to neonics from bees foraging for pollen.

After calculating the risk based on a “dietary no observable adverse effect concentration” — the highest experi-



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Crew members at Hiatt Honey Co. near Ephrata, Wash., split honeybee hives March 28, 2012, in preparation for bee pollenization in tree fruit orchards that spring. A 2016 WSU study says pesticide risk to honeybees is low.

mental point before there is an adverse effect on a species — of five parts per billion, study results suggest low potential for neonics to harm bee behavior or colony health.

“Calculating risk, which is the likelihood that bad things will happen to a species based on a specific hazard or dose, is very different from calculating hazard, which is the potential to cause harm under a

specific set of circumstances,” said co-author Allan Felsot, WSU Tri-Cities professor of entomology and environmental toxicology.

“Most of what has dominated the literature recently regarding neonicotinoids and honeybees has been hazard identification,” he said. “But hazardous exposures are not likely to occur in a real-life setting.”

Felsot said the study shows that the risk of bee exposure to neonicotinoids is small because bees aren’t exposed to enough of the pesticide to cause much harm in a real-world scenario.

Lead author Timothy Lawrence, assistant professor and director of WSU Island County Extension, said many sublethal toxicity studies, whether at the organism level

or colony level, have not done formal dose-response analyses.

“The question we posed focused on the risk of exposure to actively managed honeybee colonies in different landscapes,” he said.

With the cooperation of 92 Washington beekeepers, the team collected samples of bread, or stored pollen, from 149 apiaries across the state.

Throughout the one-year trial, neonics residue was detected in fewer than five percent of apiaries in rural and urban landscapes. Two neonics, clothianidin and thiamethoxam, were found in about 50 percent of apiaries in agricultural landscapes.

Although neonics insecticide residues were detectable, the amounts were substantially smaller than levels shown in other studies to not have effects on honeybee colonies. The WSU researchers referenced 13 studies to identify no observable adverse effect concentrations for bee populations, which they used to perform a risk assessment based on detected residues.

“Based on residues we found in apiaries around

Washington state, our results suggest no risk of harmful effects in rural and urban landscapes and arguably very low risks from exposure in agricultural landscapes,” Felsot said.

While exposure levels were found to be small, Lawrence said it is still important to be careful with use of neonicotinoid insecticides and follow product label directions. For example, insecticides should not be used during plant flowering stages when bees are likely to be foraging.

“While we found that bees did not have chronic exposure to adverse concentrations of neonicotinoids, we are not saying that they are not harmful to bees — they are,” he said. “People need to be careful with pesticide use to avoid acute exposure.”

Other researchers on the study included Elizabeth Culbert, WSU Food and Environmental Quality Lab (GEQL) research technician; Vincent Hebert, WSU associate professor of entomology and laboratory research director; and Steven Sheppard, WSU professor and department chairman of entomology.

## Two wolves shot in NE Washington; operation continues

### Two females shot from helicopter

By DON JENKINS  
Capital Press



Courtesy of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife has killed two members of the Profanity Peak wolf pack.

has shot wolves to stop depredations on livestock.

One wolf was shot in the Huckleberry pack in 2014 and seven in the Wedge Pack in 2012. The wolf shot in 2014 was the pack’s breeding female, intensifying the criticism directed at the department by some wolf advocates.

WDFW, with the counsel of its Wolf Advisory Group, recently revised its lethal-removal policy, hoping to clarify what ranchers are expected to do to prevent depredations and what the department will do if those measures fail.

The new policy also states WDFW will give only weekly reports during lethal-removal operations.

Martorello said the department doesn’t expect to give another report until Aug. 17.

WDFW says the policy protects the safety of the public, ranchers and department employees.

WDFW enlisted the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Wildlife Services in 2012 and 2014 to shoot wolves.

This time, WDFW is carrying out the operation. A federal judge ruled the federal agency can’t lethally remove wolves without a more thorough review of the environmental impact.

Wolves are not a federally protected species in the eastern one-third of Washington, where the Profanity Peak wolves were shot. Wolves are a state-protected species throughout Washington, but the state’s wolf management policy allows for lethal removal to stop depredations.

Washington’s wolf population, estimated at 90 at the end of 2015, is mostly concentrated in the northeastern corner of the state.

## Merger sparks organic milk competition worries

### Danone plans to buy Whitewave Foods for \$12.5 billion

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press



Capital Press File

Holstein cows are seen in this file photo. The proposed merger of two large dairy companies has some on the organic dairy industry worried.

A proposed merger between two major dairy processors has sparked concerns of reduced competition for organic milk, potentially reducing prices paid to farmers.

The planned takeover of Colorado-based Whitewave Foods for \$12.5 billion by Danone, a global corporation based in France, would likely shrink the number of buyers for organic milk in many markets, according to the Cornucopia Institute, an organic industry watchdog group.

“It could have a profound impact on the options that organic dairy producers have,” said Mark Kastel, the nonprofit’s co-founder.

Danone and Whitewave are currently competing in the organic dairy industry with CROPP, a farmers’ cooperative that owns the Organic Valley line of products.

Significantly, CROPP supplies milk for the Stonyfield Farm brand of yogurts, which is owned by Danone, and licenses to sell fluid milk under the Stonyfield Farm label.

With the proposed merger, however, Danone would have Whitewave’s milk production under its control, probably eliminating its

need to buy from CROPP, said Kastel.

“It would be counterintuitive that those relationships would continue,” he said.

Capital Press was unable to reach representatives of Danone or Whitewave as of press time.

Organic Valley said that the organic dairy industry remains robust, which is underscored by Danone’s investment in Whitewave.

“We are a favored vendor of Stonyfield and we have pioneered the organic industry together,” Organic Valley said in a statement. “We plan to continue our collaboration and to serve their organic fluid milk needs.”

Whitewave traditionally buys from large “concentrated animal feeding operations,” or CAFOs, while

Organic Valley is oriented toward family-scale farms, said Kastel.

With a bigger economy of scale, the combined Danone-Whitewave could depress organic milk premiums and possibly weaken Organic Valley’s position in the market, he said.

“If we end up with an imbalance of power, it could bring the wholesale price down for everybody,” Kastel said.

Cornucopia Institute has asked the U.S. Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission to investigate the merger for anti-competitive effects.

Peter Carstensen, a law professor specializing in agricultural antitrust at the University of Wisconsin, said the group’s request has merit.

“It’s the kind of transac-

tion that ought to be looked at very seriously,” he said.

It’s possible that Danone-Whitewave wouldn’t mind reducing milk prices and putting dairy farmers out of business in the short term, because over the long term, a smaller milk supply could justify higher prices, Carstensen said.

“There’s an opportunity here for strategic behavior,” he said.

A representative of the Federal Trade Commission said the agency “does not confirm the existence of or comment on investigations” but would make any findings public if a lawsuit was brought to block the merger.

Capital Press was unable to reach a representative of the Department of Justice as of press time.

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