

# Possible Widespread Effects for Crop Protection Industry from New Honey Bee Policies

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June 2015

On May 19th, the Obama White House rolled out its *National Strategy to Promote the Health of Honey Bees and Other Pollinators*. Less than two weeks later, EPA proposed label restrictions that would prohibit all use of pesticides that are acutely toxic to honey bees at any time during bloom if a field is under contract for honey bee pollination. This EPA proposed rule could have far-reaching implications for farmers by limiting nearly all market-leading insecticides and many herbicides while crops are in bloom.

The 58-page report was released by the White House on behalf of the Pollinator Health Task Force. It addressed the four themes centrally laid out in a June 2014 Presidential Memorandum titled "Creating a Federal Strategy to Promote the Health of Honey Bees and Other Pollinators:" (1) focusing on research to understand, prevent, and recover from pollinator losses; (2) expanding public education programs and outreach; (3) increasing and improving pollinator habitat; and (4) developing public-private partnerships across all these activities. The Task Force's findings are intended to improve the strategy and science supporting the government's land management and regulatory decisions.

The report and accompanying "Pollinator Research Action Plan" are focused on addressing several conditions that place stress on pollinator populations or habitat, including pests and pathogens, reduced habitat, lack of nutritional resources, and exposure to pesticides. The strategies outlined are directed at three overarching goals:

## Practice Areas

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Environment & Product Regulation

- **Honey Bees:** Reduce honey bee colony losses during winter to no more than 15% within 10 years. This goal is informed by Bee Informed Partnership surveys and quarterly and annual surveys by the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). Based on data from the NASS surveys of beekeepers, the Task Force will develop baseline data and additional goal metrics for winter, summer, and total annual colony loss.
- **Monarch Butterflies:** Increase the Eastern population of the monarch butterfly to 225 million butterflies occupying an area of approximately 15 acres (six hectares) in the overwintering grounds in Mexico, through domestic/international actions and public-private partnerships, by 2020.
- **Pollinator Habitat Acreage:** Restore or enhance seven million acres of land for pollinators over the next five years through Federal actions and public/private partnerships.

These are ambitious goals. To accomplish them, federal agencies must dramatically boost research on environmental stressors to bees and butterflies; expand pollinator habitat in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) by paying landowners not to farm on large tracts of land; provide seed mixes that offer plenty of blooms with good-quality pollen; and improve outreach, especially between beekeepers and farmers.

The strategy also calls on Congress to approve the \$82 million dedicated to pollinators in Obama's fiscal 2016 budget, the bulk of which will go to USDA's research arms and the agency that administers CRP. The request is \$34 million over fiscal 2015 enacted levels.

On May 29th, EPA followed up the White House report by proposing sweeping label restrictions that would prohibit any applications of pesticides during bloom on fields where bees provide contracted pollination services if a pesticide is acutely toxic to bees. 80 Fed. Reg. 30,644 (May 29, 2015). Nearly every market-leading insecticide is classified as acutely toxic to honey bees, so this proposal would leave the crop protection industry and farmers nationwide scrambling to find effective, alternative pest control options for continuously blooming crops such as cotton, citrus, and strawberries. Comments on the proposed rule must be submitted by June 29, 2015.