

(English version)

Question for written answer E-002020/25
to the Commission
Kristian Vigenin (S&D)
(20 May 2025)

Subject: Protecting bees from harmful pesticides and promoting sustainable agriculture in the EU

Bee-keeping is a vital part of EU agriculture, both economically and environmentally. Bees play a key role in pollinating crops and maintaining biodiversity in Europe. Safeguarding bee health is not only a matter of protecting producers of honey and bee products, but also of guaranteeing sustainable agriculture and food security for EU citizens.

At the same time, the use of certain pesticides has an adverse impact on the bee population. Scientific data and a host of testimonies from bee-keepers point to a worrying decline in bee colonies, with the chemicals used in agriculture remaining one of the main reasons for this.

In the light of the above, I would like to ask the following questions:

1. What concrete steps is the Commission taking to speed up the establishment of the European Reference Laboratory, whose aim is to strengthen the monitoring and control of pesticide residues, especially those affecting bee health?
2. Is the Commission considering introducing increased restrictions or bans on active substances in pesticides that are proven to be harmful to pollinators?
3. Is targeted financial support being envisaged for sustainable farming research and practices that limit the use of harmful substances and promote the coexistence of agriculture and bee-keeping?

Submitted: 20.5.2025

Answer given by Mr Várhelyi on behalf of the European Commission
(30 July 2025)

1. There are four EU Reference Laboratories for pesticide residues developing analytical methods and supporting EU national reference and official laboratories. The EU coordinated multiannual control programme ⁽¹⁾ for residues includes, among others, residues of pesticides affecting bee health. Furthermore, the exposure of honeybees to pesticides was monitored in the EU preparatory action Insignia ⁽²⁾.
2. Decisions on the approval of active substances used in plant protection products are based on a comprehensive scientific risk assessment considering effects on human health and the environment, including on bees, in accordance with criteria set in Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009 ⁽³⁾. The Commission already restricted the approval of active substances (e.g., most neonicotinoids ⁽⁴⁾) to ensure protection of pollinators and will continue to do so whenever warranted. Moreover, Regulation (EU) No 2023/334 ⁽⁵⁾ bans the import of food and feed containing residues of two neonicotinoids to avoid that products imported into the EU contribute to global pollinator decline. The Commission is in the process of strengthening by 2026 ⁽⁶⁾ the risk assessment for bees by working towards endorsing the updated European Food Safety Authority's Bee Guidance Document ⁽⁷⁾.
3. The EU Common Agricultural Policy provides for eco-schemes and agro-environmental commitments to support bee protection, biodiversity and organic farming. In 2023, support for organic farming granted covered nearly 6% of EU agricultural area and sustainable pesticide use practices covers almost 30% ⁽⁸⁾. Horizon 2020 ⁽⁹⁾, Horizon Europe ⁽¹⁰⁾, as well as research under the Agroecology ⁽¹¹⁾ and Biodiversity ⁽¹²⁾ Partnerships, fund ⁽¹³⁾ research for reduced pesticide use and biodiversity-friendly farming.

⁽¹⁾ The most recent control programme was adopted by Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2024/989 of 2 April 2024 concerning a coordinated multiannual control programme of the Union for 2025, 2026 and 2027 to ensure compliance with maximum residue levels of pesticides and to assess the consumer exposure to pesticide residues in and on food of plant and animal origin and repealing Implementing Regulation (EU) 2023/731, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg_impl/2024/989/oj.

⁽²⁾ <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/spaces/EUPKH/pages/36702461/Pollution+monitoring+Insignia>.

⁽³⁾ Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009 of the European Parliament and the Council concerning the placing of plant protection products on the market, OJ L 309, 24.11.2009, p. 1.

⁽⁴⁾ https://food.ec.europa.eu/plants/pesticides/approval-active-substances-safeners-and-synergists/renewal-approval/neonicotinoids_en.

⁽⁵⁾ <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2023/334/oj>.

⁽⁶⁾ https://food.ec.europa.eu/plants/pesticides/protection-bees_en.

⁽⁷⁾ <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/7989>.

⁽⁸⁾ 'The 28 CAP Strategic plans underway — summary of implementation in 2023-2024 — facts and figures' (June 2025) (https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/cap-my-country/cap-strategic-plans_en#at-a-glance).

⁽⁹⁾ Examples not exhaustive: <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/773921>; <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/817622>; <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101003476>.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Examples not exhaustive: <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/773921>; <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/817622>; <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101003476>.

⁽¹¹⁾ <https://www.agroecologypartnership.eu/>.

⁽¹²⁾ <https://www.biodiversa.eu/2022/10/31/beehope/>.

⁽¹³⁾ Exact amount varies depending on the inclusion of projects focused on honeybees, all pollinators, precision farming, organics, agroecology, biodiversity conservation, and other related areas.