

EPA approves use of bee-killing pesticide

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Just days after another federal agency suspended its periodical study of honey bee populations, the EPA greenlighted the wider use of a pesticide that environmental activists warn could further decimate the pollinators.

A major conservation group says it will take the agency to court over the decision.

The EPA said Friday it was permitting the broader use of the pesticide sulfoxaflor, a move that follows a request by chemical manufacturer Dow AgroSciences LLC.

"EPA is providing long-term certainty for U.S. growers to use an important tool to protect crops and avoid potentially significant economic losses, while maintaining strong protection for pollinators," Alexandra Dapolito Dunn, assistant administrator for EPA's Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention, said Friday.

The EPA approval of sulfoxaflor follows a decision by the Agriculture Department last week to suspend its study of bee populations, a tool that beekeepers use to track the decline of colonies. The USDA cited limited "fiscal and program resources" as justification for its decision to stop collecting the data.

Dow Chemical Co., the former parent of Dow AgroSciences, gave President Donald Trump \$1 million for his 2017 inauguration, according to data compiled by OpenSecrets.org, a project of the Center for Responsive Politics.

Gregg Schmidt, a spokesman for the company, now called Corteva Agriscience following its spinoff after the merger of Dow and DuPont, said it was "pleased" with EPA's decision. "Growers should have access to tools that can be used safely according to the product label," he said in an emailed response.

Researchers have observed the sudden and quick disappearance of honey bee colonies in the U.S.

and other parts of the world, with implications for ecosystems, [crop yields](#) and nutrition.

Blame for the bees' losses have been assigned to intensive farming practices; planting of a single crop on the same land year after year, or monocropping; excessive use of agricultural chemicals and higher temperatures due to [climate change](#), according to the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization.

"Bees are under great threat from the combined effects of climate change, intensive agriculture, pesticides use, biodiversity loss and pollution," said FAO's Director-General Jose Graziano da Silva in a video for World Bee Day in May. "The absence of bees and other pollinators would wipe out coffee, apples, almonds, tomatoes and cocoa to name just a few of the crops that rely on pollination."

Between April 2018 and the same month this year, beekeepers in the U.S. lost about 40.7% of their colonies, according to a report by of the Bee Informed Partnership, a program partly run by the University of Maryland and Auburn University.

"Just looking at the overall picture ... it's disconcerting that we're still seeing elevated losses after over a decade of survey and quite intense work to try to understand and reduce colony loss," Geoffrey Williams, assistant professor of entomology at Auburn University and co-author, said in comments accompanying the June 19 report. "We don't seem to be making particularly great progress to reduce overall losses."

A study published in the journal *Nature* found exposure to sulfoxaflor reduced bees' ability to reproduce.

"The Trump EPA's reckless approval of this bee-killing pesticide across 200 million U.S. acres of crops like strawberries and watermelon without any public process is a terrible blow to imperiled pollinators," Lori Ann Burd, the director of the Center for Biological Diversity's environmental

health program, said following EPA's announcement. "With no opportunity for independent oversight or review, this autocratic administration's appalling decision to bow to industry and grant broad approval for this highly toxic insecticide leaves us with no choice but to take legal action."

The Obama administration in 2015 moved to ban the use of the pesticide after a lawsuit brought by beekeepers. Another court decision later prompted the Obama EPA to allow the use of the pesticide although it restricted it to only crops that are not attractive to pollinators.

Dow AgroSciences, the manufacturer of the pesticide, in 2018 filed an application to the EPA for wider use of sulfoxaflor, according to a filing in the Federal Register.

EPA's decision on Friday not only adds new uses for the pesticides but also removes previous restrictions.

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