Open Letter to the British Bee Keepers Association

January 10 2011

Since 2001, the British Bee Keepers Association has been receiving in the region of £17,500 per annum from pesticide manufacturers Bayer, Syngenta, BASF and Belchim in return for the BBKA's endorsement of several insecticides as 'bee-friendly'.

The BBKA policy of accepting money from such corporations, taken without consulting the membership, has been condemned by many of its members, other European bee keeping associations and some NGOs as unethical.

While the Executive have now changed their mind again and have dropped the direct endorsement of pesticides, there are still some very important questions that remain unanswered.

And - importantly - they have *not* ruled out accepting money from the pesticide manufacturers under other pretexts.

We call on the BBKA to sever all financial ties to manufacturers, sellers and promoters of any substance known to be or likely to be toxic to bees or other insects.

Philip Chandler, Friends of the Bees
Dr. Hugh Salvesen, Trustee, Natural Beekeeping Trust

These are the key questions that need answering if the BBKA wishes to be seen as fairly representing the interests of British bees and bee keepers:

(1) When the BBKA Executive made the decision to endorse the initial four insecticides, what due diligence procedures did it employ that led to the conclusion that these insecticides were 'bee-friendly'? Did the manufacturers provide peer-reviewed, independent research to back up their claims?

(2) Was the Executive aware, for example, of the research (i) published in 1995 - 6+ years before the decision - that demonstrated deltamethrin (one of the endorsed pesticides) to be deadly to bees, even in extremely small doses? And the research (ii) published 1993 that clearly states 'Cypermethrin is highly toxic to bees'?

(3) If the Executive was aware of this research, what led it to ignore or override its findings?

(4) If the Executive was not aware of this research, does it still consider that it undertook due diligence before endorsing these pesticides?

(5) Did the Executive, during the subsequent years of endorsement, keep a review on published research about the endorsed pesticides?

(6) And is the Executive familiar with the research (iii) published in 2005 that shows both cypermethrin and deltamethrin to be 'highly toxic to honeybees'? If not, please review your answer to Q5.

(7) It is clear from Dr Bernie Doeser's review of the science (iv)(sent to you November 2 2010) that the very pesticides the BBKA endorsed are very far from being 'bee-friendly'; in fact three of them are among the five most toxic pesticides in their class.

In the light of this review, do you still think you made the right decisions? And will you be taking up Dr Doeser's generous offer of expert help and advice in such matters?

(8) In the light of the above, the BBKA executives who were responsible for the endorsement policy appear to have been either:

(a) negligent in their assessment of published research, or

(b) reckless in their endorsement of products known to be toxic to bees.

Which do you consider to have been the case?

(9) Why did the BBKA Executive fail to support their colleagues in Germany, Italy, France, Spain and Belgium in a call for the systemic, neurotoxic, neonicotinoid insecticides Imidacloprid, Thiamethoxam and Clothianidin to be removed from the European list of permitted agricultural chemicals? (v)

(10) What measures do you propose to put in place to ensure that:

(a) BBKA takes a firm stance against the introduction into our environment of unnecessary toxic chemicals, especially the widely-condemned neonicotinoids? (vi)(vii)

(b) BBKA members are not again embarrassed by having to apologize to the rest of the world for being represented by a body that endorses bee-killing chemicals?

(c) Members of the BBKA Executive, whether elected or co-opted, make a full, public declaration of any financial, academic or research interests that they hold in partnership with pesticide companies, the agricultural, pharmaceutical and food industries, - or any other industry that could be deemed a conflict of interest.

(d) BBKA supports the organic/pesticide-free farming movement, including the Soil Association, the Wholesome Food Association, Garden Organic and the Biodynamic Agricultural Association, in their encouragement to farmers to use non-chemical growing methods?

This letter is supported by:

- Dr David Bellamy OBE
- Dr Karim Vahed, Entomologist & Reader in Behavioural Ecology, University of Derby
- Dr. Andreas Daugsch, PhD, Post-Doc researcher at Unicamp University, Brazil
- L. R. B. Mann M.Sc Ph.D applied ecology consultant, beekeeper of 21 y Whangaparaoa, New Zealand
- Dr David Heaf, beekeeper, Wales
- Dr Henk Tennekes, toxicologist, Netherlands
- Manfred Hederer, President, German Professional Beekeepers Association
- John Salt, ex-President, Moray Beekeepers Association
- Michael Young MBE
- Michael Weiler, Dipl.Ing.agr and beekeeper, Advisor for Biodynamic Beekeeping
- Thomas Radetski, Association for the Development of Ecological Apiculture, Germany
- James Fearnley, author and researcher
- The Trustees of the Natural Beekeeping Trust
- Alys Fowler
- Chris Packham
- Chris Baines, independent environmentalist and champion of wildlife gardening
- Michael Thiele, GaiaBees
- A.E. McArthur, MIL, Emeritus editor of Scottish Beekeeper magazine 1995 - 2005
- Kate Canning FRSA, member Twickenham & Thames Valley BKA
- Tom Petherick
- Alan Beat
- Nicholas Evans, author
- Brigit Strawbridge
- Biodynamic Association
- Günter Friedmann, professional Master Beekeeper, Leader of the German group of Demeter-certified Beekeepers
- Sky McCain, Wholesome Food Association
- Nick Delaney, Somerset beekeeper
- Patrick Moulesdale, Somerset Beekeeper
- Nick Mole, Pesticide Action Network UK
- Rebecca Hosking MSc, MBE, farmer
- Tim Waygood, farmer
- Maddy Harland, editorial director, Permaculture Magazine
- Teresa van Dijk, research scientist, Netherlands
- Emma Hockridge, Head of Policy, Soil Association
- Lord Peter Melchett, Soil Association
- Amanda Williams buzzaboutbees.net @helpthebees
- Graham White, environmental campaigner, writer, beekeeper
- Pete Riley, GM Freeze
- Philipp Mimkes, Coalition against BAYER Dangers (Germany)

(A number of other people wrote to indicate their support, but were unable to include their names here due to conflicts of interest, or for other reasons.)

References

(i)May 1995, Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry Volume 14, Issue 5, pages 855–860, the summary of which reads:

Foraging activity of bees is currently disturbed by treatments with pyrethroid agrochemicals. To discover eventual troubles of spatial orientation of the foragers, we exposed bees to sublethal doses of deltamethrin sufficiently low to avoid motor inco-ordination or muscular troubles. In an insect-proof tunnel, bees were trained to forage at a feeder 8 m from their nucleus. When temperature and global radiance conditions were optimal, some foragers were caught, exposed to a deltamethrin dose 27 times lower than its LD50, and released after 20 min of recovering. Among the contaminated bees, 54% took flight toward the sun and 81% did not come back to their nest within 30 s (which is 3 times longer than the mean time of control bees). Because pyrethroids are known to disturb learning and memory, we cannot conclude if this disorientation is due either to a trouble of information storage (wrong spatial perception or phototropism increase), or to a trouble of information retrieval (bad comparison of actual and memorized patterns). Routine chemical analysis of exposed bees does not detect residues of deltamethrin 3 hours after bee sublethal exposure, although bees evidenced alteration in the flight.

(ii) Alpha-cypermethrin is the active ingredient in BASF's 'Contest', one of the endorsed pesticides. See: Pesticide Information Profile (A Pesticide Information Project of Cooperative Extension Offices of Cornell University, Michigan State University, Oregon State University, and University of California at Davis), 1993 http://tinyurl.com/dvwf7
NB - "The recommended application rates of alpha-cypermethrin are lower than those of cypermethrin because the former is biologically more active." http://tinyurl.com/337clxy

(iii) Contact Toxicity of Some Insecticides to Apis Mellifera and Apis Cerana, J. Asia-Pacific Entomol. 8(1): 113-115 (2005) http://tinyurl.com/33scbuo

(iv) Dr Bernie Doeser, Observations on the Effectiveness of the BBKA endorsing Four Pesticides http://tinyurl.com/37z4z65
Also with ref to Bulletin of Insectology 56 (1): 103-109, 2003
ISSN 1721-8861 http://tinyurl.com/35v7l48

(v) http://www.cbgnetwork.org/1736.html

(vi) Concern over Imidacloprid, Graham White
http://www.britishbee.org.uk/articles/imidacloprid.php
'According to James Frazier, PhD., professor of entomology at Penn State’s College of Agricultural Sciences, "Among the neonicotinoids, clothianidin is among those most toxic for honey bees; and this combined with its systemic movement in plants has produced a troubling mix of scientific results pointing to its potential risk for honey bees through current agricultural practices. Our

own research indicates that systemic pesticides occur in pollen and nectar in much greater quantities than has been previously thought, and that interactions among pesticides occurs often and should be of wide concern." Dr. Frazier said that the most prudent course of action would be to take the pesticide off the market while the flawed study is being redone.'

(vii) Dr Henk Tennekes, A Disaster In The Making (2010)
http://tinyurl.com/2v29hwu

Key Facts

1. Insecticides are designed to kill insects. Bees are insects. Insecticides kill bees. 'Bee-friendly insecticide' is an oxymoron.

2. Modern insecticides are extremely powerful. Some of them are capable of killing bees in dilutions that are barely detectable by the latest analytical equipment, and have been shown to cause disorientation in bees, likely to result in death, in dilutions that cannot currently be measured.

3. Of the four insecticides endorsed by the BBKA as 'bee-friendly', three are among the top five most toxic in their class. (see Dr Doeser's report, cited above). Deltamethrin was introduced around 1984. The 48-hr contact LD50 for honey bees is 1.5 ng/bee (highly toxic). Cypermethrin was introduced around 1977. The 48-hr contact LD50 for honey bees is 20 ng/bee (highly toxic).

4. In the UK, annual spraying of the 4 endorsed pesticides covers an area one and a half the times the size of Wales.

5. The BBKA appears never to have issued any public statement that is critical of any pesticide or pesticide manufacturer.

6. The BBKA has never issued any statement in support of the organic movement in general or the Soil Association in particular, despite the apparent logic of allying themselves with those who are working for an overall reduction in the use of pesticides in agriculture. Instead, they have allied themselves with those who have a vested interest in increasing the use of pesticides.

7. The BBKA failed to support their colleagues in Germany, Italy, France, Spain and Belgium in a call for the systemic, neurotoxic, neonicotinoid insecticides Imidacloprid, Fipronil, Thiamethoxam and Clothianidin to be removed from the European list of permitted agricultural chemicals. http://www.cbgnetwork.org/1736.html

8. The BBKA did not consult its members before accepting donations from agri-chemical companies in return for use of the BBKA logo.

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