

Open Letter to American Beekeepers

The Presidential Task Force Report on ***Bee and Pollinator Health*** has been widely condemned for failing to address the primary cause of bee-deaths in America: pesticides. Environmental NGOs have strongly criticised the Task Force Report including: PANNA, Beyond Pesticides, Center for Food Safety, Friends of the Earth, National Resources Defense Council and EcoWatch [please read articles in [footnote 1](#)].

The central criticism is that this report gives pesticides a free pass in relation to bee colony deaths. It is largely 'Greenwash' to cover up the issue of mass bee deaths and delay action; a nice piece of window dressing designed to give the illusion that 'something is being done', when in truth, nothing substantial is being done at all.

In contrast to the reaction of the NGOs, there has been a deafening silence from the national beekeeping organisations; this suggests their complete submission to the corporations which set up and dominated the Task Force: Bayer, Syngenta and Monsanto.

Independent scientists overwhelmingly blame just one factor for millions of bee colony deaths: the prophylactic use of neonicotinoid seed-dressings, (along with fungicides, herbicides and growth regulators), on over 200 million acres of American crops. There is no doubt that the primary objective of those who ran this Task Force, was to defend the market freedom and profitability of their pesticides at all costs. In order to justify this corporate greed, they rejected a mountain of scientific evidence (more than 800 peer-reviewed papers), which confirm neonicotinoids as the primary factor in global bee decline. They also dismissed the eye-witness accounts of some of America's most eminent beekeepers, who ascribe the loss of thousands of their colonies, to the lethal cocktail of pesticides which saturates the farming landscape.

Everything else on the Task Force Agenda was just 'smoke and mirrors', to divert attention from the pesticide companies' real objectives, namely to:

- Absolve pesticides of all responsibility for global bee deaths;
- Protect neonicotinoids from any threat of regulatory interference
- Preserve the market dominance of neonicotinoids and their 2.4 billion dollar annual profits.

'The Silence of the Beekeepers'

However, if the pesticide interests were to successfully hijack the Pollinator Task Force, they had to co-opt, or coerce American beekeepers, into signing-off on their 'pesticide-protection agenda'. If the beekeepers refused to sign, the whole 'pollinator protection illusion' would collapse like a house of cards. The pesticide companies could only succeed by gagging the beekeepers with their own report. It is not known how they manipulated the beekeepers into this self-censorship; but the fact that it was done, is plain to see.

The beekeepers representatives agreed to ignore the central role of pesticides in bee colony deaths. Attention was diverted to peripheral issues, like varroa mites and lack of wild flowers; but pesticides barely got a mention. The only 'action' the Task Force agreed to take on pesticides was to have "***better messaging***"; a meaningless phrase from the corporate playbook. Any proposal for stricter regulation of pesticides was taboo; any idea that the EPA might copy the European restriction on neonicotinoids was simply laughable.

The EPA made vague promises about 're-assessment' of neonics, in a couple of years; but any immediate action was simply out of the question. "***Business as usual***" was the corporate objective; "***carry on poisoning***" was the slogan. Diversionary and delaying tactics were adopted: 'plant more flowers' and fund even more 'diversionary research' into the alleged 'mystery' of millions of dead bee colonies.

Faced with the apparent terminal decline of American beekeeping, with 30-40% losses annually, the Presidential Task Force offered nothing but a band-aid, and some flowers for the funeral.

Why would beekeepers co-operate in their own destruction?

Unless the beekeepers who signed this agenda were fast asleep during the discussions, they must have realised they were gifting the EPA and the pesticide companies 'free license' to carpet-bomb America with billions of pounds more pesticides, for decades to come.

By signing-off on the Task Force Report:

- They ignored the European Union's 2013 ban of the major neonicotinoids; along with hundreds of peer-reviewed Science studies, on which that ban was based.
- They swallowed the EPA's 'Big Lie': that 200 million acres of neonicotinoid treated crops do not even qualify as 'pesticide use' and are not even mentioned in the pesticide statistics.
- They bought the official story of 'multifactorial causes', which ascribes bee deaths to: varroa mites, viruses, fungal and bacterial diseases. These factors all contribute of course; but the single factor which opens the door to the invasion of these pathogens, is the crippling of the bees' immune system by neonicotinoids. 'Multifactorial cause of bee deaths', is just another industry-generated smokescreen to hide 'the elephant in the room'; pesticides!
- They agreed to unrestricted use of the currently licensed neonicotinoids.
- They agreed to fund USDA scientists to carry out even more 'diversionary research' on the same dead-end topics, which have yielded zero improvement in the last 15 years.
- They opted for Voluntary State Pollinator Plans rather than the mandatory labelling: "*do not apply during bloom*".

Questions that demand an answer

1. Why have the American Beekeeping Federation and the American Honey Producers Association agreed to ignore the truth: that neonicotinoids and other pesticides are the primary cause of mass bee deaths?
2. Why did they fail to raise any objection, when the Task Force declared that any discussion of the link between neonicotinoids and bee-deaths was simply 'taboo'? Did they not understand what was at stake here? Were they too naive or too timid, to object?
3. Were they persuaded, or simply coerced, into betraying their own members interests?

These questions are largely academic; when they signed-off on this report, they surrendered the future of American Beekeeping into the tender care of: the EPA, the Pesticide Corporations and Croplife.

Fight or Surrender?

American beekeeping stands at a crossroads: one road leads to a pesticide-drenched future, mapped out in this Task Force Report. If the beekeepers swallow this without a fight, they condemn themselves and their industry to an increasingly toxic decline, ruled over by the pesticide companies and the ethically corrupt EPA.

The alternative road is the path of public and political resistance. It is true that this would involve many battles, but this is the only possible route that could lead to a healthy future for American beekeeping. If beekeepers choose to resist, they would receive the support of millions of ordinary Americans, who understand what is at stake. The choice is simple: campaign now for bee-friendly farming and a pesticide-free environment, or carry on trying to pollinate crops in a pesticide-drenched landscape that is utterly toxic to bees.

A Toxic Future for Beekeeping?

If American beekeepers accept this report, they will suffer:

- The death of millions more bee colonies every year
- The collapse of many more beekeeper businesses
- Rising neonicotinoid pollution of streams, rivers, groundwater and wells
- Accelerating decline of American wildlife: bees, butterflies, soil-organisms and birds.

Moreover, the **Pesticide Driven Agenda**, at the heart of this Report, will be seen by the public as the '**agreed agenda of American Beekeeping**'. As a result, beekeepers will find it even harder to raise objection to any use of new systemic pesticides. They will be forced to accept the dictates of the EPA and the pesticide companies; absorb the financial loss of 30 to 40% of your colonies each year, or leave the business.

Furthermore, if beekeepers really adopt this agenda as their own:

- They may be forced to publicly **oppose** the environmental NGOs, who will undoubtedly continue to campaign for a ban on neonicotinoids. Beekeepers will have no choice but to 'defend' this '**pesticide-driven agenda**' as their own, whenever neonicotinoids are debated in the media.
- They will have betrayed the 20 year struggle of their sister organisations in Germany, France, Italy and other countries, who fought many battles to achieve the European ban on neonics

We framed this letter in the hope of getting beekeepers to reconsider their involvement in this Task Force Report, and to foster debate on a new strategy. The current strategy of ABF and AHPA seems to consist of unconditional surrender to the EPA and the pesticide companies.

It is vital that American beekeepers reject this Task Force Report and the 'pesticide protection agenda' which their representatives have inexplicably signed-up to. Please speak out now! Take action yourselves. If beekeepers fail to reject this Report, their silence will be taken as 'consent' to the pesticide-driven agenda at its heart.

Contact the leadership of your beekeeping organisations: local, regional and national.
Contact the EPA and USDA; let them know how you feel about the 'Greenwash' served up in this report.
Contact your Congressional representative regarding this 'White House Whitewash' on bee and pollinator deaths.

This is the last chance to demand **real** reform of the pesticide based agriculture, that the EPA, the USDA and the pesticide companies have imposed on the American landscape and on American beekeeping.

Sincerely

Graham White, Beekeeper, Scotland, UK
Tom Theobald, Beekeeper, Niwot, Colorado
Dr Henk Tennekes, Consultant Toxicologist, Netherlands

Footnote 1: Published Criticisms of the White House PollinatorTask Force Report:

Center for Food Safety:

<http://foodtank.com/news/2015/05/top-5-takeaways-from-the-white-house-pollinator-health-task-force-announcem>

National Resources Defense Council:

<http://www.nrdc.org/media/2015/150520b.asp>

Beyond Pesticides

<http://www.beyondpesticides.org/dailynewsblog/?p=15701>

Eco-Watch:

<http://ecowatch.com/2015/05/20/problems-obama-plan-save-bees/>

Pesticide Action Network North America:

<http://www.panna.org/white-house-plan-bees-sidesteps-pesticide-problem>

National Public Radio:

<http://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2015/05/20/408017267/pollinator-politics-environmentalists-criticize-obama-plan-to-save-bees>

