

# STOP KILLING OUR BEES!

**Large scale bee losses were experienced by Western Cape beekeepers in November last year when grape farmers in the Constantia Valley wine farming area applied pesticides within their vineyards to control ant infestations.**

Beekeepers in the Western Cape face enough challenges to their commercial operations with diminishing forage resources, removal of eucalyptus species, fires, vandalism and theft without having to contend with unnecessary losses of entire colonies from irregular pesticide use. Whilst beekeepers do understand that crop growers have to use crop protection chemicals to safeguard their crops it is the illegal and incorrect irresponsible usage of such pesticides which our pollinators unnecessarily succumb to adding to further insurmountable challenges and leaving the beekeeper defenceless in the pursuit of his bee farming operations.



*Thousands of bees lie dead from pesticide poisoning.*

Yet on the other hand most responsible crop growers, and in this case wine farmers collectively, are duly concerned by the killing of bees and are prepared to collaborate towards creating a safer environment for bees.

In the particular Constantia Valley incident it was found that the use of the chemical fipronil and lambda-cyhalothrin in baits used for ant control in vineyards had caused the deaths of the bees. Insecticides which are used for ant control include Regent which contains fipronil and two registered ant remedies called Sunset and Antset which both contain the two mentioned chemicals. Following closer analysis it was discovered that more than likely Antset, which is a legal product with active ingredients fipronil and a pyrethroid, was the cause of the bee deaths. The pure fipronil insecticide is mixed with molasses as bait, which is an unregistered use of fipronil, and the two registered products were mixed with sugar bait, according to label instructions.

When notification of this serious incident came to SABIO's attention immediate contact was made with both Croplife SA, representing the crop protection industry and the Registrar, Pesticide Control in the Department of Agriculture (Act 36/1947) to intervene and assist the bee farmers in addressing the situation.

Through the coordination of Brendan Ashley-Cooper of the Western Cape Beekeepers' Association and Dr Gerhard Verdoorn of Croplife SA a



*Brendan Ashley-Cooper.*





*Illegal and incorrect application of pesticides kills thousands of bees in one irresponsible incident.*

meeting was set up on the 7 December 2018 at Buitenverwachting Wine Estate in Constantia to discuss how to address the issue. The meeting was attended by representatives of the Registrar's office, beekeepers, wine farmers and Croplife SA.

Section 7 (2) (a) (i) of the Fertilizers, Farm Feeds, Agricultural Remedies and Stock Remedies Act, 1947 (Act No. 36 of 1947) prohibits any person from recommending the use or sale of a pesticide for any other purpose or any other manner than that stated on the label. That same prohibition is reflected in regulation Nr R 1716 of 26 July 1991. That means that the use of any fipronil containing pesticide with molasses to control ants in vineyards is an unlawful action.

*"The application of any pesticide, whether commercial or household, must follow the label instructions to the tee. The off-label use, as well as the acquisition, disposal or sale of an agricultural remedy for a purpose or in a manner other than that specified on the label is illegal as per Regulation No. R1716 of 26 July 1991 under Act No. 36 of 1947" – according to a press statement released by Croplife SA on 28 November 2018 (Refer [www.croplife.co.za](http://www.croplife.co.za)).*

A number of beekeepers expressed the opinion that there should be consequences for individuals who use pesticides off-label because not only does it have an effect on their bees but also a financial loss in the form of damages to their business interests. Yet on the other hand

apiary sites are valuable resources to every beekeeper and premature prosecution of crop growers would not foster working relationships between land owner and beekeeper.

It is through meetings of this nature that the principles as espoused in the recently agreed Pollination Charter between the crop growers, the crop protection industry and beekeepers that dialogue to address these serious concerns is fundamental to preventing future bee deaths and building workable relationships between all parties.

Agreement was reached at this meeting for the vine growing sector which, whilst acknowledging ant control in vineyards is necessary, it must form part of an integrated pest management control system. Use of any fipronil that is not registered for ant control in vineyards with or without molasses must be terminated immediately. And use of sugar as bait attractant with Sunset and Antset must terminate immediately and these two registered ant remedies must be applied neat to the base of the vine trunks to control ants. This corresponds with label instructions which state that the use of sugar is optional. The Registrar (Act 36/1947) is to be approached to have the labelling amended by removing the sugar/sweetener clause. It was further agreed that all stakeholders must work together to ensure a safer environment for bees.

The constructive engagement of parties operating within the vineyard industry led to a further engagement between players in the canola industry when another meeting between Croplife SA representatives, again led by Dr Gerhard Verdoorn, crop protection chemical suppliers, and commercial bee farmers and Grain SA representing the canola farmers was held on the 7 February 2019 in Stellenbosch. Again the concerns of indiscriminate killing of bees due to wrongful application of pesticides off label were highlighted. In addition communication between farm owner and beekeeper was emphasised as crucial to avoiding bee deaths. A new Bee Death Prevention App was introduced and representatives consulted as to its practicalities and viability for the South African environment. Progress has been made in this sector.

The next target has to be the citrus industry where again reports of widespread damage to the bee industry is allegedly taking place without appropriate remedies being applied. Croplife SA has again given the beekeeping industry its support in addressing this sector. Thereafter we need to address the Macadamia industry.

Whilst it is indeed sad that these serious incidents in our industry have taken place in recent months a positive outcome must be that we are all talking to one another and that these unnecessary and often negligent acts are not being brushed under the carpet. The bee industry will continue to engage all rightful parties in preventing further incidents. But the bee industry has also warned that if measures to ensure the safety and preservation of our bees is not applied we would expect more drastic measures be implemented through statutory intervention... and unfortunately if necessary, prosecution.

**Beekeepers are encouraged to report all suspected bee poisoning deaths.** The Western Cape Beekeepers' Association has indicated that it is prepared to act as a facilitator with all players in the Western Cape in handling this sensitive issue and dealing with the appropriate authorities.

**By: Mike Miles (SABIO)**

