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Study calculates value of bees

From combined dispatches

PARIS | Bees and other pollinating insects are worth \$220 billion a year, thanks to their help in growing fruit, vegetables, oil crops, coffee, cocoa and spices, a French study has found.

Pollinators account for 9.5 percent of the value of worldwide agricultural production, according to France's National Institute for Agricultural Research (INRA).

Its paper is published in the journal *Ecological Economics*.

The research coincides with mounting concern in Europe and the United States about devastating losses to bee colonies.

If bees were wiped out, the impact for the consumer would be between \$273 million and \$446 billion, expressed in higher prices as a result of lower production, the study says.

These estimates do not take into account indirect environmental impacts deriving from bee extinction.

In Italy, meanwhile, the government has banned the use of several neonicotinoid pesticides that are blamed for the deaths of millions of honeybees, the Environmental News Network (ENN) reported.

The government last week banned seed treatment products clothianidin, imidacloprid, fipronil and thiamethoxam used in rapeseed oil, sunflowers and sweet corn.

The Italian government will start a monitoring program to further investigate the reasons of recent bee deaths, the news service reported on its Web site (<http://www.enn.com/>).

Italy followed the lead of Germany and Slovenia, which banned sales of clothianidin and imidacloprid in May.

In France, imidacloprid has been banned on sunflowers already since 1999. In 2003, the substance was also banned as a sweet corn treatment. Bayer's application for clothianidin was rejected by French authorities, according to ENN.

Bayer Group says on its Web sites that its success in insecticides is driven by vast experience in this field and continuing innovation.

"For nearly 10 years, French beekeepers have alleged that our seed treatment product Gaucho has been responsible for the death of their bees. This is in spite of the fact that extensive in-house and independent research has confirmed that Gaucho is not harmful to bees," one Bayer site says.

Imidacloprid is the active ingredient in Gaucho. It is systemic, meaning it is absorbed by the plant and poisons bugs that eat or land on leaves and flowers.

Imidacloprid is becoming increasingly common in the United States in home insecticides sold in hardware stores for outdoor garden use.

It is also used in a liquid placed on the back of dogs to kill flees and ticks. Unlike over-the-counter flea and tick killers, it usually requires approval from a veterinarian.

Clothianidin and Imidacloprid are produced by the German company Bayer CropScience and generated \$800 million in 2007, according to ENN. Imidacloprid is Bayer's best-selling pesticide.

In August, the German Coalition against Bayer Dangers brought a charge against Werner Wenning, chairman of the Bayer Board of Management, for marketing dangerous pesticides and thereby accepting the mass death of bees all over the world, the ENN report said.