Burrus Buzz Delivering more than just seed

12.20.16

Bees, Neonics and Protecting Both

by Matt Montgomery, Burrus Sales Agronomist

Honey bees and neonicotinoid insecticides – they might appear opposed to one another, incapable of occupying the same space. However, our industry is making sure the two can coexist.

A Honeybee Primer

Growers cannot afford to ignore honeybees. After all, the pollinating action of honeybees literally contributes billions to the U.S. economy annually through the agriculture sector. It is worth knowing more about them.



A honeybee colony only has one truly functional female. She is capable of reproduction and is, of course, the queen. She mates for only two weeks and stores male genetic material. If she does not fertilize an egg with that material, the result is a male drone. If an egg is fertilized, the result is a female. If fed a normal diet, females become workers that initially feed the young, then build the comb, and later forage for nectar. Workers are the most vulnerable component of the hive, and it is the loss of honeybees that concerns beekeepers. If fed a rich diet, a female becomes a new queen and may establish her own new colony.

The bees spotted in yards, pastures, and gardens are worker bees. They collect pollen and bring both food and water back to the hive to keep the hive viable. Their activity inadvertently pollinates crops which is why they are so precious to the agricultural economy.

A Neonicotinoid Primer

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Neonicotinoid seed treatments are one of the more recent row crop insecticides. These materials trick an insect's nervous system into action, keeping it from transmitting necessary signals. The result is death and less injury to the crop.

Burrus has used neonicotinoid seed treatments for two decades. Since doing so, we have rarely had customers replant corn due to a stand reduction caused by early season insect damage. Neonics have made this once common request into a relatively uncommon occurrence, proving both their effectiveness and value.

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Colony Collapse and Neonicotinoids

Colony reduction became a large topic for discussion a decade ago, when beekeepers began to report widespread colony demise. The proximity of colony collapse to increased neonicotinoid use was noted, and neonics naturally became a suspect.

The EPA currently notes that colony collapse likely stems from a variety of contributing factors including: parasitic mite infestations, disease, pesticide use both within the hive to control mites and outside the hive, transportation stress as bee colonies are moved from one specialty crop site to another, changes in habitat (reduced forage), and a combination of the above. While colony collapse is still an issue, the EPA has noted a recent decrease in collapse for reasons that are not completely understood.

Our industry wants to minimize any possible contribution to the issue. Researchers have determined that bees exposed to neonics are most likely exposed to dust released from planters as it coats wild plant material (2013. Journal of Apicultural Science 57 (2): 199-208). Reducing dust is key.

To reduce dust on your operation, Burrus offers SuperFLOW[™], a Bayer manufactured seed lubricant. This polyethylene material, when used correctly, can reduce planter dust by 90% and residual off-target neonicotinoid movement by 65%.



Super FLOWSM

In addition, SuperFLOW works with all planter makes and models on both corn and soybeans. Ask your Burrus Account Manager to add SuperFLOW to your 2017 order and we will deliver it with your seed. Improved seed lubricant technology that reduces bee exposure to neonics, allowing both to coexist. That's a good day for us all.

Questions or comments for our agronomic research team? Submit to us at burrus.seed@burrusseed.com

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