WRITTEN QUESTION P-2052/06
by Marie-Hélène Aubert (Verts/ALE)
to the Commission

Subject: Harmfulness of systemic insecticides to non-target insects and persistence of active substances used to treat seed in the environment

Pursuant to Directive 91/414/EEC[1], the Commission has to decide whether or not to include in Annex I active substances of systemic insecticides used to treat seed. Fipronil, thiametoxam and imidacloprid are currently being analysed, and clothianidin has just been authorised. This raises two questions:

Firstly, there is the question of whether these active substances are harmful to non-target insects such as bees. Is the Commission aware that, based on current procedures, the assessment of the risks to bees exposed to plant protection products still does not enable so-called sub-lethal toxic effects to be detected or those associated with chronic contamination, to which many experts and academics attribute the weakening of colonies of bees in contact with these new systemic insecticides?

Secondly, there is the question of the persistence of these active substances in different environments. Various studies show that the substances have an impact on water and soil far exceeding the values laid down in Directive 91/414/EEC (clothianidin has a half-life in soil ranging from one to four years, measured under real conditions, as against a limit of 90 days laid down by the Community!).

Many measurements taken worldwide show contamination of untreated water with imidacloprid over and above the Community limit of 0.1 ppb, which is the standard for drinking water.

This persistence at levels above the standard is directly responsible for the widespread contamination of our environment with these substances, as revealed by a study conducted by the French Food Safety Agency, in which 62% of samples of pollen, mostly taken from wild flowers, were found to be contaminated with imidacloprid and 14% with fipronil!

Are the Commission and the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health familiar with these data and studies? Has account been taken of these when examining substances already authorised? Will they be taken into account in connection with the examination of active substances in future?

In the light of the widespread contamination of the environment with imidacloprid and fipronil, which are representative of the new generations of systemic insecticides, is it not imperative to exclude from Annex I active substances of any systemic insecticide used to treat seed, if we do not wish to run the risk of another 'silent spring'?

[1] OJ L 230, 19.8.1991, p. 1