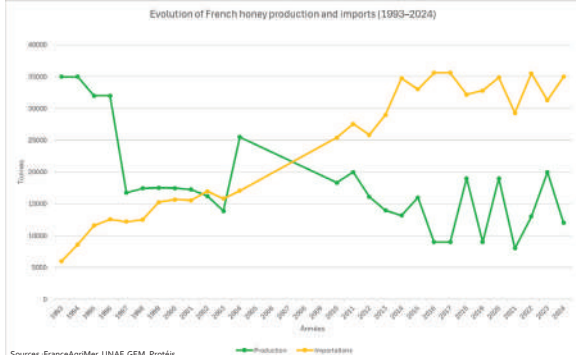




French beekeepers against neonicotinoids: a 30-year struggle

French beekeeping since 1995: a dramatic situation

At the beginning of the 1990s, neonicotinoid insecticides were introduced in France. Since then, about **300 000 hives have perished each year** and have to be replaced. **Mortality has risen from 5% to 30%¹**. **Honey yields per hive have significantly reduced**, halving French honey production in 20 years. At the same time, honey imports have exploded.



Strong mobilisation of beekeepers ...

The scientific evidence of toxicity is accumulating

From the start, producers of these new insecticides denied their effects on bees.

But more and more studies have gradually confirmed beekeepers observations: imidacloprid is found in both pollen and nectar²; the products are very persistent and toxic at infinitesimal doses both in pollen and nectar³.

As early as 2003/2004, a scientific and technical committee setup by the French government concluded that imidacloprid and fipronil led to 'worrying risks to bees', 'in agreement with beekeepers' observations⁴. Ten years later, those results were confirmed by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)⁵.

Since then, numerous scientific studies have confirmed the negative impact of neonicotinoids on bees⁶.

A bitter legal battle

The French government however, failed to act on this information. Consequently, French beekeepers decided to engage in a legal fight to prohibit these products and enforce their rights.

Between 1998 and 2021, the National Union of French Beekeeping (UNAF) initiated or intervened in over 20 proceedings⁷ against those toxic insecticide authorizations, either attacking their producers or the French government.

An unprecedented media mobilisation

Demonstrations were organised by beekeepers, mobilising the whole profession and involving a large coalition of environmental and farmers' organizations.

Creating connections : UNAF has engaged in permanent exchanges with scientists. UNAF has also established closer ties with farmers' and citizens' organisations working to establish fair, democratic and environmentally friendly agricultural and food policies.

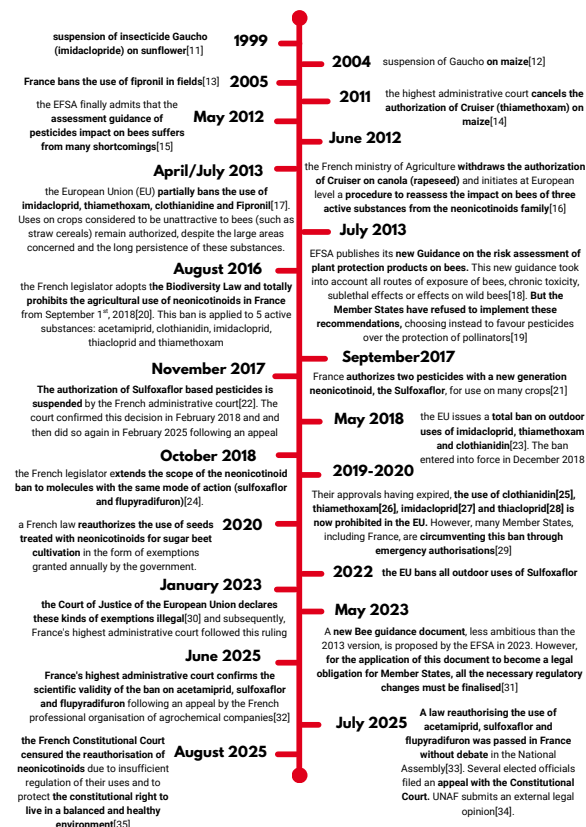
Since 2005, an environmental awareness campaign called 'The bee, sentinel of the environment' has been run by UNAF. A significant number of hives have been placed on the buildings of local authorities or companies. This created real opportunities to show the role of pollinators and to evidence the causes of their vanishing.

Mobilisation of elected representatives: from 2010, UNAF initiated a support committee for bees and beekeepers, composed of deputies from the French and European parliaments who are committed to defending the interest of the pollinators¹⁰: more than 100 parliamentarians have joined the Committee to this day.

Significant resources deployed: important legal fees (around 100 000 euros per years) and **significant human resources** (ten employees, among them a press manager and project managers).

Active involvement in European lobbying: UNAF is a founding member of BeeLife¹⁹, an European beekeeping coordination aiming at studying the impact on bees of pesticides and at questioning European policy-maker.

Over several years, the scientific, legal and media battle has achieved some victories which are constantly being challenged



The battle continues in France, in Europe, and worldwide...

In France:

With attempts to reauthorise neonicotinoids, the mobilisation of beekeepers and many other stakeholders (scientists, pesticide victims, farmers, environmental NGO, lawyers, etc.) is stronger than ever.

A citizens' petition against the law of 8 July 2025, posted on the National Assembly website, has gathered more than 2 million signatures.

Although, the French Constitutional Court censured the reauthorisation of neonicotinoids, UNAF remains vigilant for any new legislative proposals that may arise in the future.

In Europe:

...because there are still many gaps³⁶ in the methodology for assessing the risks of pesticides, which allows dangerous substances to still be authorised and leaves the door open to the authorisation of new pesticides that are just as dangerous as neonicotinoids.

In the world:

...because it is still one of the most widely used insecticide class on the planet

1 EPILOBEE report 2013-2013, "Plateforme ESA - Mortalité des colonies d'abeilles domestiques pendant l'hiver 2017-2018. Premiers résultats", 24 October 2018/2022.

2 M. Bornnath et al., « A LC50/50/50 Method for Analysis of Imidacloprid in Soils, in Plants, and in Pollens », Anal. Chem. 2003/755027-2003, April 2003.

3 M. T. Collin et al., « A Method to Quantify and Analyze the Foraging Activity of Honey Bees: Relevance to the Sublethal Effects Induced by Systemic Insecticides », Archives of Environmental Contamination and Toxicology, vol. 47, no 3/September 2004, p. 387-395.

4 Comité Scientifique et Technique de l'Etude Multifactorielle des Troubles des Abeilles (CST), « Imidaclopride utilisé en engraisage de semences (Gaucho) et troubles des abeilles », Rapport final », 18 September 2009.

5 EFSA, « Conclusion on the peer review of the pesticide risk assessment for bees for the active substances clothianidin, thiamethoxam, and imidacloprid », 2013, <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/press/news/130116>.

6 The Task Force on Systemic Pesticides worldwide integrated assessment of the impacts of systemic pesticides on biodiversity and ecosystems, 2015; Chen et al., 2024.

7 Yoo et al., 2021; Piza et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2018; Zhao et al., 2020; Lu et al., 2020; Debarb et al., 2023; Malladi et al., 2023.

8 To learn more, UNAF press file available on the website, October 2018.

9 www.abellescentrales.net

10 www.abellescentrales.net

11 <https://www.bee-life.eu/>

12 22 January 1999

13 22 May 2004

14 Ministerial order of 6, 15 et 19 April 2005 banning marketing and use of plant protection products containing the fipronil active substance

15 Conseil d'Etat, 16 February 2011, Cruiser, Union Nationale de l'Agriculture Française

16 EFSA, « Scientific Opinion on the science behind the development of a risk assessment of Plant Protection Products on bees (Apis mellifera, Bombus spp. and solitary bees) », 23 May 2012.

17 Ministerial order of 24 July 2012 banning the use and marketing of Cruiser seeds treated with plant protection products containing thiamethoxam

18 Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 485/2013 of 24 May 2013

19 EFSA, Guidance on the risk assessment of plant protection products on bees (Apis mellifera, Bombus spp. and solitary bees), 27 June 2013

20 Greenpeace Europe press release, 23 January 2019, « Leak: European governments pave way for bee-killing pesticides »

21 LAW n° 2018-1087 of 8 August 2018 - art. 125 - Art. L.253-8 of the Code rural

22 21 Annex, 27 September 2018, authorisation of the plant protection products Closer and Transform

23 TA de Nice, 23 November 2017, Ordonnances de référé, Closer and Transform; CE, 15 February 2018, Closer and Transform; CAA de Marseille, 28 February 2025, Closer and Transform

24 Commission Implementing Regulations (EU) of 29 May 2018 No 2018/783, 2018/784, 2018/785

25 LAJ n° 2018-036 of 30 October 2018 - art. 83

26 31 January 2019

27 30 avril 2019

28 30 avril 2019

29 3 février 2020

30 Article 53 du règlement (CE) n° 1107/2009

31 (CEJEU), 19 January 2023 (affaire C-16/21) PAN Europe e.a. Protection phytosanitaire; CE, 3 May 2023 No exemption is possible if the European Commission has formally banned a pesticide

32 The Regulation on the uniform principles still need to be amended.

33 <https://www.conseil-estat.fr/fr/annuaire/decision/2025-06-05-488338>

34 Proposition de loi visant à lever les contraintes à l'exercice du métier d'agriculteur

35 CP, Loi Duplomb : L'UNAF dépose une contribution au Conseil constitutionnel, 22 juillet 2024.

36 Conseil constitutionnel, décision n° 2025-891 du 7 août 2025

37 For example, Academic studies are not sufficiently taken into account, the chronic toxicity of commercial formulations due to the cocktail effect must be properly assessed. In order to identify all the flaws, <https://pesticides-evaluation.fr/failles/>

PP-145 [Bee Health]

French beekeepers against neonicotinoids: a 30-year struggle

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In the early 90s, a new generation of pesticides used to coat seeds, the neonicotinoids, appeared and enjoyed considerable success. These hyper-powerful molecules (imidacloprid, thiamethoxam, acetamiprid, etc.) are diffused throughout the plant as it grows, from seed to flower. In large-scale farming areas, beekeepers complained about the sudden loss of bee populations and honey harvests, and blamed these new treatments. Scientists very quickly provided undeniable proof of the causal links between neonicotinoids and excess bee mortality. And this at infinitesimal doses. On the basis of the European directives in force, UNAF engaged in a very long legal, political and media struggle at national and European level, which lasted for more than twenty years. This struggle is eloquent in many respects, and for that reason deserves to be analysed to serve as an example to follow for future controversies. It made it possible to ban these molecules at national level and to marginalise them at European level. But today, with the agricultural crisis, these achievements are once again under threat...