

## FARMERS, BEEKEEPERS, CROPLIFE SOUTH AFRICA AND RESEARCHERS TAKE HANDS TO ENSURE A BETTER FUTURE FOR HONEY BEES

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The Western Cape Bee Industry Association (WCBA) organised a workshop at the Buitenverwachting wine estate in the Constantia Valley near Cape Town on Friday 7 December to discuss the recent mass mortality of bees in the district. Beekeepers, wine farmers, researchers from the Agricultural Research Council, members of the Directorate of Agriculture Inputs Control's Inspectorate, the Cape Town Municipality and CropLife South Africa representatives and members attended the workshop. The objectives were to identify the cause of the bee deaths and to agree on mitigation measures to prevent such a catastrophe from occurring again.

Lars Maack, the owner of Buitenverwachting wine estate who hosted the workshop, opened discussions by expressing wine farmers' concerns about the bee deaths and appealed for collaboration in finding solutions to the problem. Brendan Ashley Cooper, a prominent beekeeper in the Western Cape, provided background to the recent events in which a large number of bees owned by various beekeepers in the area were killed by what was believed to be irresponsible pesticide applications. Chemical analyses of a representative sample of the dead bees positively identified two insecticides, namely fipronil and lambda-cyhalothrin. During the discussions it was confirmed that fipronil was used on vines in an effort to control ants by mixing it with molasses. Unfortunately, this is not an approved method for ant control in vines. In addition, two registered ant control pesticides that contain a mixture of fipronil and lambda-cyhalothrin were applied, mixed with sugar.

The workshop attendees agreed that the use of any sugar-based lures, including molasses, was the reason for bees being attracted to the ant baits. Representatives of the registration holder of the two fipronil plus lambda-cyhalothrin products assured the workshop that using the products without sugar will successfully control ants and the products are registered for straight application without any bait attractant. Delegates agreed to be vigilant about the illegal use of fipronil with molasses and ensure that the registered pesticide mixtures with fipronil and lambda-cyhalothrin shall only be used without an attractant bait.

The wine farmers of the Constantia Valley have already made great strides with integrated pest management. Distributors of plant protection products and wine farmers are incorporating biological pest management into vineyard pest management with great success. For example, the huge challenges posed by mealybug is already something of the past for most of the valley's wine producers due to the successful deployment of biological control. Ants do however, upset these efforts by fighting off biological organisms that are used for the control of mealybug, hence an ant control mechanism is required. All parties agreed that the two registered fipronil plus lambda-cyhalothrin pesticides can be used effectively for this purpose. The insecticides are applied to the base of the vine trunk and keeps ants off the main parts of the vine. Ants play a very important role in the agricultural ecology and therefore none of the stakeholders want a situation where ant nests are completely destroyed, but rather strive for a mechanism where ants are kept away from the productive parts of vines.

This model of collaboration among multiple stakeholders needs to be perfected in the Constantia Valley and then rolled out to other parts of South Africa where bees are also at risk of unnecessary pesticide impacts. CropLife South Africa undertook to steer the process with the assistance of the beekeepers, the wine farmers, the research institutes and the Department of Agriculture, which form part of the CropLife South Africa's Pollinator Forum objectives. In addition, a Pollinator Charter was developed between CropLife South Africa, SABIO and organised agriculture, including AgriSA,

Hortgro, GrainSA, SANSOR, Subtrop and the CRI, to highlight the responsibilities of all parties to ensure bee health.

The plant science industry has made a commitment to implement appropriate measures to ensure the survival and proliferation of pollinators. Working with beekeepers and farmers is paramount to the successful achievement of this commitment. CropLife South Africa is also conducting a review of labels of insecticides that may pose a risk to bees in order to ensure that appropriate bee safety measures are incorporated on to all product labels.

**For media inquiries, please contact:**

Name: Elriza Theron  
Position: Marketing and Communications Manager  
CropLife South Africa  
Tel: 072 443 3067  
Email: [elriza@croplife.co.za](mailto:elriza@croplife.co.za)

Wine farmers representative:  
Lars Maack  
Buitenverwachting Wine Estate  
E-mail: [lars@buitenverwachting.com](mailto:lars@buitenverwachting.com)  
082 577 0880

Bee Industry Association Representative:  
Brendan Ashley Cooper  
E-mail: [ouderaapkraal@gmail.com](mailto:ouderaapkraal@gmail.com)  
082 484 0030

**Note to Editor:**

CropLife South Africa is the voice of the South African plant science industry. It champions the role of agricultural innovations in crop protection and plant biotechnology in supporting and advancing sustainable agriculture; helping farmers feed a growing population while looking after the planet; and progressing rural communities. The world needs farmers, and farmers need plant science. CropLife South Africa is proud to be at the heart of helping farmers grow.

This is a joint media statement from CropLife South Africa, WCBA and Wine farmers of the Constantia Valley.