



PRESS RELEASE

A slap in the face of the victims

The German Federal Ministry of Food, Nutrition and Agriculture (BMEL) downplays the problem of glyphosate contamination in honey instead of drawing conclusions and protecting beekeepers and bees

Berlin, January 21 2020 | Contrary to a [statement given on January 15 2020](#) by the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL), we would like to make it clear that the cases of damage caused by the glyphosate contamination of honey, which have been examined by the [Aurelia Foundation](#) and the ["Alliance for the Protection of Bees"](#), are most certainly not "isolated individual cases", as the Ministry claims. In fact, this is a systemic problem. In our view, the BMEL's assertions are not only wrong in terms of content, but also irresponsible towards those affected and the German public. Instead of drawing final conclusions from the cases known to date, the BMEL prefers to downplay the problem and divert attention from its own political failures.

Under the current state of beekeeping across Germany, it is reasonable to assume that all flowering plants are visited by honey bees and wild pollinators. This also means that where glyphosate is applied to flowering plants, it will be absorbed by bees and other pollinators within the flight radius. Inevitably, this leads to high levels of stress among the bees and causes residue in honey, pollen, wax and bee bread. The federal and state authorities must have been aware that use of glyphosate-based herbicides in flowering fields fundamentally jeopardises the honey and its marketability since at least 2016, when the Aurelia Foundation first discovered and documented this problem in several federal states.

In 2018, the German consumer watchdog 'Stiftung Warentest' detected glyphosate in every third honey purchased in Germany (journal "Test" 2/2019, page 12). In 2016, the Lower Saxony State Office for Consumer Protection and Food Safety detected glyphosate residue levels exceeding the permitted threshold values MRL (=maximum residual limit) in more than three percent of the honey samples tested. Statistically, in state of Brandenburg, this would correspond to an estimated quantity of about 30,000 kilograms of honey per year exceeding the MRL threshold (see Appendix).

Since 2016, despite repeated requests, the BMEL has not responded to our call for a ban on

the use of glyphosate-based herbicides in flowering crops, and thus clearly sees no need for action. This paralysis of action is harming bees, beekeepers and consumers - as evident in the present [case of the Seusing beekeeping in Brandenburg](#). The other victims include the farmers and, in particular, nature through damage to wild plants, pollinating insects and the environment in general.

Johann Lütke Schwienhorst, Aurelia Foundation Agricultural Officer, explains: *"The majority of farmers in Germany have a genuine interest in protecting pollinating insects and do not approve of the use of glyphosate-based herbicides in flowering crops. Such activity is not compatible with good agricultural practice. Nevertheless, the Federal Minister of Agriculture Julia Klöckner (CDU) and BMEL tolerate such inappropriate applications. BMEL even allows explicit product recommendations from Bayer, which recommend the use of glyphosate-based herbicides in flowering plants. We must ask whose interests the BMEL serves with such a policy? Certainly not the public interest."*

Annette Seehaus-Arnold, Vice President of the German Professional and Commercial Beekeepers' Association (DBIB), says: *"The fact that the BMEL is downplaying the problems of glyphosate-based herbicides as an "isolated individual case" disrespects the beekeeper family, whose existence is on the brink of bankruptcy, and it disrespects the entire German beekeeping community. The regret expressed in the press release about this case is worth nothing if the BMEL does not admit its own responsibility and does not respond to our requests and demands. The recommendation from the EU Commission, among others, simply states that beekeepers should move their bees to safe zones. That is completely unacceptable. Considering that the flight radius of bees is up to three kilometers, there is hardly any flowering location left in Germany where bees are safe from glyphosate and other pesticide contamination. Bees need flowers."*

Saskia Richartz, spokesperson of the "Wir haben es satt" alliance, stated: *"The fact that Minister of Agriculture Klöckner is trying to dismiss four tons of glyphosate-contaminated honey as an "isolated individual case" is a slap in the face to the Seusing family and all other beekeepers who fear for their livelihoods because of the German government's pesticide policy. Instead of ridiculing criticism with terms such as 'bullenbu mentality' [i.e.: imagining a fantasy land according to own desires], Julia Klöckner should act on the phase-out of pesticides. Our neighbouring countries Austria, France and Luxembourg have issued bans on use of glyphosate-based herbicides thus showing convincingly that if you want to do it, you can."*

Additional background information on the current case (in German):

www.aurelia-stiftung.de/glyphosat-im-honig

Press relations:

Florian Amrhein (Aurelia Foundation - Head of Public Relations)

Phone: +49 (0)30 577 00 39 66

Mobile: +49 (0)176 34 51 52 07

Email: florian.amrhein@aurelia-stiftung.de



Annex

Technical remarks to claims by the German Ministry of Food, Nutrition and Agriculture (BMEL) on glyphosate contamination of honey, issued in a statement on January 15, 2020

Principally, we welcome the fact that the BMEL is now taking a stance for the first time on the glyphosate contamination of honey. We also welcome the fact that the BMEL is interested in maintaining the reputation of German honey as a quality brand. We share this interest and we therefore expect the BMEL to enact consequences in the form of restrictions on the use of glyphosate-based herbicides, so that glyphosate-based preparations may no longer be used on flowering plant stands, thereby ending up in honey and other bee products.

A systemic problem

In its press release, the BMEL refers to cases such as the Seusing beekeeping project in Brandenburg as

"isolated individual cases". The ministry does not consider any of the restrictions on use that we are calling for. We therefore conclude the is obvious: the BMEL does not see any need for intervention. Against their best knowledge, Julia Klöckner (CDU) and her officers accept the immediate threat to the existence of beekeepers in the alleged "isolated individual cases". The BMEL is only able to assert its claims of isolated individual cases because the ministry and the responsible federal and state authorities only take individual incidences into account.

The Aurelia Foundation first alerted the German authorities to honey contamination by glyphosate-based herbicides in 2016, in a contamination case in Brandenburg, Germany. The concentration of the active ingredient glyphosate in cornflower honey exceeded the MRL up to about 200-fold. Therefore, such honey is considered a threat to human health and must not be sold. In the same year, the State Office for Consumer Protection and Food Safety in Lower Saxony conducted its own investigations, testing 193 honey samples for glyphosate residues. Six of the

samples exceeded the maximum residue level (MRL) for glyphosate¹. This corresponds to slightly more than three percent of the honey samples examined. In Brandenburg 52,585 bee colonies were counted in 2017 under the Ordinance on Bee Diseases². Assuming a calculated average honey yield of 20 kg/hive³, about 1,000,000 kg of honey is produced in Brandenburg each year. Statistically, as three percent of honey with glyphosate exceeded MRL values, this calculation shows that in Brandenburg about 30,000 kg of honey exceeds the MRL each year.

The investigations carried out by the State of Brandenburg in 2016 are the cornerstone values for the BMEL to support its claim that there is "essentially no problem" with glyphosate in Brandenburg. This statement has not yet been made public. We expect the authorities to publish these results immediately.

In the current case of the beekeeping enterprise Seusing, the glyphosate contamination found has led to the loss of permission to market more than four tons of honey. This has been shown to be caused by at least two different alleged 'isolated individual cases' of glyphosate sprayings on flowers - within one county and within a period of less than three months.

Glyphosate flower spraying - not in compliance with good farming practice

The first case the of the use of glyphosate was aimed at exterminating a 70-hectar dandelion-weeded alfalfa grass field. Such action is unusual and highly questionable. Farmers who practice their profession in accordance with good agricultural practice guidelines will mow and harvest such a crop despite weeds and use it as fodder. If for some reason the forage is not desired, it makes sense to treat the grass-alfalfa dandelion with mulcher before ploughing the area or extermination with a herbicide preparation.

A mandatory prohibition on the use of any herbicide on flowering crops would only restrict those arable farms that operate outside good agricultural practice guidelines. On the other hand, such a ban would provide the much-needed legal clarity for beekeepers because they are exposed to excessive burdens from such glyphosate applications.

The second causative use of glyphosate at another bee site belonging to the Seusing enterprise most likely took place in the context of desiccation in a surrounding grain field. A leaflet from the Land Connects Initiative states: "Desiccation (the use of glyphosate just before harvest to accelerate the ripening of the crop) is severely limited but should, in the opinion of a large majority of farmers, be completely banned". Furthermore, desiccation has been prohibited in Austria since July 2013.

The application regulations of the Federal Office for Consumer Protection and Food Safety (BVL) in turn stipulate "that late applications [of glyphosate] in cereals are only permitted for partial areas, where harvesting would otherwise not be possible due to weed growth in stored crops or twigs in

¹ Lower Saxony State Office for Consumer Protection and Food Safety under "Glyphosate and pyrrolizidine alkaloids in honey": https://www.laves.niedersachsen.de/lebensmittel/rueckstaende_verunreinigungen/glyphosat-und-pyrrolizidine-alkaloide-in-honey-141253.html (accessed on 17.01.2020)

² Brandenburg Landtag under "Förderung der Neu-/Jungimkerei im Land Brandenburg": https://www.parlamentsdokumentation.brandenburg.de/starweb/LBB/ELVIS/parladoku/w6/drs/ab_9900/9995.pdf (accessed on 17.01.2020)

³ German Beekeepers' Association under "Beekeeping in Germany": <https://deutscherimkerbund.de/160-Die-deutsche-Imkerei-auf-einen-Blick> (accessed on 17.01.2020)

stored or standing crops."⁴ In case of doubt, the agricultural holding may decide itself when the exceptional conditions for desiccation are fulfilled. The BVL explicitly cites severe weed infestation, for example due to a high occurrence of flowering cornflowers in the cereal field and the resulting heterogeneous stand, as justification for desiccation. As such, the BMEL's regulatory authority is encouraging rather than preventing the contamination of honey by glyphosate.

Whose interests does the BMEL represent and support?

Considering that restricting the use of glyphosate to non-flowering crops would be accepted by most agricultural professionals or is even considered to be absolutely necessary, it is inexplicable why the BMEL does not already impose this restriction on use for the forthcoming growth season.

In the instructions for using a glyphosate pesticide for exterminating the alfalfa grass dandelion (Durano TF, producer: Bayer Agrar Deutschland GmbH), it is stated under '*Information for proper use*': '*For sustainable control of persistent broadleaf weeds, application during the flowering stage is recommended.*'⁵ The fact that pesticide manufacturers are still allowed to issue such recommendations for use ultimately harms those farmers who use these products according to such recommendations and thus cause damage; above all to the affected beekeeping operations and the health of bees and wild pollinators.

BMEL leaves beekeepers hopelessly in the lurch

The BMEL's claim that the glyphosate damage to Seusing beekeeping is an isolated case shows us that the problem is still not taken seriously enough at a political level. The beekeepers are completely let down by the problem. Despite repeated requests, the BMEL and its subordinate authorities have not commented on the question of why our demand for the protection of beekeepers by restrictions on the use of glyphosate in flowering plant stands has not been met since 2016.

Political inaction forces us to take legal action

We cannot accept the inactivity of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and its subordinate authorities in the cases we are dealing with. We will continue our legal efforts to claim justice for those affected as well as for the protection of beekeepers in such cases. At a time of insect and species extinction, we can no longer accept the health of bees and the environment being put at risk by the improper use of pesticides. In the pending court case, we are therefore fighting for a regulation model that will result in better protections from pesticide use in the future for everyone - consumers, producers, bees and the environment.

⁴ BVL, Neue Anwendungsbestimmungen für Pflanzenschutzmittel mit dem Wirkstoff Glyphosat: https://www.bvl.bund.de/SharedDocs/Fachmeldungen/04_pflanzenschutzmittel/2014/2014_05_21_Fa_Neue_Anwendung_Glyphosat.html (accessed on 18.01.2020)

⁵ Instructions for use BAYER DURANO TF, page 2: <https://pim.bayercropscience.de/etikett.pdfstream?product=750>; (retrieved on 16.01.2020).