Resolution on the situation in the beekeeping sector

2008/2645(RSP) - 20/11/2008 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

Following the debate which took place during the sitting of 19 November 2008, the European Parliament adopted by 458 votes to 13, with 5 abstentions, a resolution tabled by the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development on the situation in the beekeeping sector, which is currently encountering very serious difficulties, Parliament points out that there is a serious threat of a decline in bee colonies due to the significant reduction in the supply of pollen and nectar. There has been a drastic decline in the number of bee colonies in the world. Members recall that the continued presence in hives of the parasitic bee mites, Varroa spp, colony collapse disorder and the spread of Nosema ceranae are among the causes of the crisis in bee health. 76% of the production of food for human consumption is dependent on the beekeeping sector and 84% of vegetable species cultivated in Europe depend on pollination.

In view of this, and noting that no methods exist as yet to eradicate certain bee diseases which result in a reduction in their resistance and the loss of hives, Parliament considers that it is essential to respond without delay to the crisis in bee health in an appropriate manner and with effective tools. It calls on the Commission to step up immediately further research into the parasites and diseases, as well as other potential causes such as erosion of genetic diversity and cultivation of genetically modified crops, decimating the bee population, while making additional budgetary resources available for this research.

Members also consider that action should be taken to tackle unfair competition from apiculture products originating in third countries, which is partly the result of lower production costs, particularly as regards the price of sugar and labour. It is vital to make it compulsory to indicate the country of origin of bee honey on labels. It is also vital to introduce a requirement that imported honey be analysed to detect the possible presence of American foulbrood bacteria.

Parliament calls upon the Commission, and where appropriate, the council, to do the following :

- introduce measures under the CAP Health Check encouraging the creation of ecological compensation areas (such as apicultural set-aside areas) especially in large areas of arable cultivation. Such areas must be situated in those parts of fields which are difficult to cultivate, where plants such as phacelia, borage, charlock and wild white clover could be grown, providing rich sources of nectar in areas where bees gather;

- give due consideration to the health of bees, the possibilities for marketing bee products and the economic impact on the beekeeping sector in all discussions and future legislative steps concerning the cultivation of genetically modified crops in the European Union;

- promote the necessary measures to limit the risk of insufficient pollination both for beekeepers and for farmers, whose production could increase considerably;

- ensure that the quality of surface water is monitored and controlled, as bees are highly sensitive to any deterioration in their environment;

- undertake research into the link which exists between bee mortality and the use of pesticides such as thiamethoxam, imidacloprid, clothianidin and fipronil so that it can take appropriate measures as regards authorisation of such products;

- coordinate all information pertaining to this situation that is presently available in each Member State. Parliament believes that the Commission should cooperate with recognised organisations with a view to exchanging scientific information they have concerning the impact of pesticides on bees;

- propose a financial aid mechanism for apiaries which are in difficulties due to bee mortality;

- incorporate into its veterinary policy research into, and action to tackle, bee diseases;

Lastly, Parliament calls on the Commission to urge all Member States to bring forward immediate support for the beekeeping sector.