

A VISUAL REFERENCE TOOL ON TOXICITY OF ACTIVE SUBSTANCES USED IN ITALY IN AGRICULTURE TOWARDS BEES

INTRODUCTION

Pollinators, in particular bees, play a crucial role in biodiversity conservation and by ensuring agricultural productivity. However, these insects are routinely exposed to a wide range of substances used in agriculture, many of which are potentially harmful. When the application of pesticides is necessary, farmers should be able to know the level of toxicity of different substances in order to adopt conscious choices, thus favouring those substances that are less harmful to bees. In all cases, being aware of the potential toxicity enables farmers to adopt appropriate mitigation measures to minimize risks to bees and other pollinator insects.

To support pollinator health and reduce pesticide-related risks, the following practices are recommended:

- Select active substances with a lower toxicity on pollinators whenever possible.
- Avoid applying insecticides, or other bee-toxic substances, during flowering, including in the days prior to hive placement for pollination services.
- Even when using products classified as low-risk to bees, treatments during flowering should be limited to strictly necessary.
- If spontaneous flowering plants are present within the field, mow the vegetation at least two days before treatment to reduce floral attractiveness to pollinators.
- If anti-hail nets are used during flowering, ensure they are properly installed and do not interfere with pollinator movement or orientation.
- When treatments are necessary, apply them during periods of low pollinator activity, preferably early in the morning or after sunset.
- Avoid applying treatments on windy days to minimize spray drift and unintended exposure.

THE TOOL

To support farmers in choosing less harmful products, we developed a two-part reference tool:

- **TABLE 1** provides data on the acute toxicity and environmental persistence of active substances currently authorized in Italy for use in agriculture, focusing on their effects on *Apis mellifera* L. and, when available, on *Bombus terrestris* L. and *Osmia* spp.
 - **TABLE 2** shows the sublethal effects of these substances, as reported in the literature with reference to *A. mellifera*, *B. terrestris* and *Osmia* spp.
- Toxicity classes (high, medium, low) were assigned based on LD₅₀ values (oral or contact exposure), using the following thresholds for all three species:
- < 2 µg/bee = high toxicity (orange)
 - 2–100 µg/bee = medium toxicity (yellow)
 - 100 µg/bee = low toxicity (green)

If both contact and oral LD₅₀ values were available, the lower value was considered. When toxicity levels differed among species, the value for the most sensitive species was used.

Active substances classified as “high” or “medium” toxicity were further evaluated for their environmental persistence, based on the DT₅₀ value (the time required for 50% degradation under specific conditions). The DT₅₀ in soil from field trials was considered whenever available. In the absence of such data, the “Typical” DT₅₀ value from the literature was used instead and is highlighted in red in the table. Substances with a DT₅₀ of 15 days or more were considered “persistent”, while those with a DT₅₀ below 15 days were considered “non-persistent”. Persistence was not assessed for substances classified as having low toxicity. Persistent substances are shown in Tables 1 and 2 with their names written in red, to make them easily identifiable.

KEYWORDS

Pesticide toxicity, Sublethal effects, Bee health, Pollinators, Agricultural practices, Field-use decision tool, Farmer-oriented reference tables

TABLE 1
TOXICITY AND PERSISTENCE TOWARDS ADULT BEES OF THE ACTIVE INGREDIENTS USED IN PESTICIDES IN ITALY

ACTIVE SUBSTANCE	FUNCTION	LD ₅₀ TOPICAL/ORAL (µg/BEE)		DT ₅₀ (IN-FIELD SOIL / TYPICAL)
		<i>Apis mellifera</i>	Other bees	
2,4-D	Herbicide	94		28.8
Acequinocyl	Acaricide	280		Data excluded from analysis
Acetamiprid	Insecticide	8,09	1,72	3
Acibenzolar-S-Methyl1	Fungicide, Bactericide	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Acifluorfen	Herbicide	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Ametoctradin	Fungicide	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Amidosulfuron	Herbicide	>100	>100	Data excluded from analysis
Aminopyralid	Herbicide	>3,13		12,1
Amisulbrom	Fungicide	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Ampelomyces quisqualis	Fungicide	Non-toxic	70000	Data excluded from analysis
Aureobasidium pullulans	Fungicide	Non-toxic		Data excluded from analysis
Azadirachtin	Insecticide, Fungicide, Acaricide	>8,1		5
Azoxystrobin	Fungicide	>25		180,7
<i>Bacillus amyloquelicifaciens</i> QST 713	Fungicide, Bactericide	1,8 x 10 ⁶ CFU/bee		Data excluded from analysis
<i>Bacillus amyloquelicifaciens</i> FZB24	Fungicide	>6000 CFU/bee*		Data excluded from analysis
<i>Bacillus amyloquelicifaciens</i> MBI 600	Fungicide	>100 CFU/bee*		Data excluded from analysis
<i>Bacillus amyloquelicifaciens</i> subs. <i>Plantarum</i>	Fungicide	>320 CFU/bee*		Data excluded from analysis
<i>Bacillus pumilus</i> QST 2808	Fungicide	Non-toxic		Data excluded from analysis
<i>Bacillus subtilis</i> strain IAB/BS03	Fungicide, Bactericide	Data not available		Data not available
<i>Bacillus thuringiensis</i> subs. <i>azawai</i>	Insecticide	>100 CFU/bee*		Data excluded from analysis
<i>Bacillus thuringiensis</i> subs. <i>kurstaki</i>	Insecticide	>100 CFU/bee*		Data excluded from analysis
<i>Beauveria bassiana</i>	Insecticide	>9285 CFU/bee*	>1,16 x 10 ¹⁰ CFU/bee**	Data excluded from analysis
Benalaxyl-M	Fungicide	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Benflufenol methyl	Herbicide	>51,4		4,5
Bentazone	Herbicide	>200		Data excluded from analysis
Benzoxifen	Fungicide	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Bifenazate ²	Acaricide	8,5	9,6	4,8
Bifenthrin	Herbicide	>200		Data excluded from analysis
Bixafen	Fungicide	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Blad poly peptide	Fungicide	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Boscalid	Fungicide	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Bromuconazole	Fungicide	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Bupirimate	Fungicide	>50		34
Buprofezin	Insecticide	>163,5	>69	Data excluded from analysis
Calcium polysulphide	Insecticide	Data not available		Data not available
Captan	Fungicide	>100	100,45	Data excluded from analysis
Carfentazone-ethyl	Herbicide	>81		0,5
Cerisevian	Fungicide	>100*		Data excluded from analysis
Chitosan hydrochloride	Fungicide, Insecticide	>100*		Data excluded from analysis
Chlorantraniliprole	Insecticide	>4	5,92	204
Chloromequat	Herbicide	>65,2		27,4
Chlorotoluron	Herbicide	>200,2		Data excluded from analysis
Chlodimol	Herbicide	>199,2		Data excluded from analysis
Clodinafop-propargyl	Herbicide	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Clozoxazole	Herbicide	>76,33	>968	27,3
Clopyralid	Herbicide	>98,1		8,2
Copper oxychloride	Fungicide	12,1		0,1
Cos-oga	Fungicide	>10		Data not available
Cyantraniliprole	Insecticide	>0,0934	>0,54	32,4
Cyazofamid	Fungicide	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Cyflumetofen	Herbicide	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Cyflufenamid	Fungicide	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Cyflumetofen	Acaricide	>102		Data excluded from analysis
Cyhalofop-butyl	Herbicide	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Cymoxanil	Fungicide	>85,3		3,5
Cypermethrin	Insecticide	0,023	0,119	21,9
Cyprodinil	Fungicide	>75		45
Dazomet	Soil fumigant	>10		1,2
Deltamethrin	Insecticide	0,0015	0,057	21
Dicamba	Herbicide	>89,5		3,9
Dichloroprop-p	Plant growth regulator	>200		Data excluded from analysis

ACTIVE SUBSTANCE	FUNCTION	LD ₅₀ TOPICAL/ORAL (µg/BEE)		DT ₅₀ (IN-FIELD SOIL / TYPICAL)
		<i>Apis mellifera</i>	Other bees	
Diclofop-methyl	Herbicide	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Difenoconazole	Fungicide	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Diffenolan	Herbicide	>100	>100	Data excluded from analysis
Dimethenamid-p	Herbicide	118,4	>158	Data excluded from analysis
Dimethomorph	Fungicide	>32,4	>283,2	44
Disodium phosphate	Fungicide	>520		Data excluded from analysis
Dithianon	Fungicide	>25,4		35
Dodemorph	Fungicide	>76,6		41
Dodine	Fungicide	145		Data excluded from analysis
Emamectin	Insecticide	Data not available		Data not available
Esfenvalerate	Insecticide	0,07		19,2
Ethofumesate	Herbicide	>50		37,8
Equisetum arvense	Fungicide	Data not available		Data not available
Etofenprox	Insecticide	>0,038	0,177	11
Etoxazole	Acaricide	>200		Data excluded from analysis
Eugenol+Geraniol+Thymol	Fungicide	>200		Data excluded from analysis
Eythiazox	Acaricide	>112		Data excluded from analysis
Fatty acids	Insecticide, Acaricide	>96,04		3
Fenazaquin	Acaricide	1,21		30,5
Fenhexamid	Fungicide	>102,07		Data excluded from analysis
Fenoxaprop-P-ethyl	Herbicide	>100	>100	Data excluded from analysis
Fenpicoxamid	Fungicide	>202,4		Data excluded from analysis
Fenpirazamin	Fungicide	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Fenpropidin	Fungicide	>10		49,2
Fenproxiimate	Fungicide	>15,8		6,8
Ferric phosphate	Molluscicide	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Fliazsulfuron	Herbicide	>100	97,5	Data excluded from analysis
Fluazifamid	Insecticide	>100	>75,8	Data excluded from analysis
Florasulam	Herbicide	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Florpyrauxifen-benzyl	Herbicide	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Fluazifop-p-butyl	Herbicide	>200		Data excluded from analysis
Fludioxonil	Fungicide	>100	55,8	25,9
Flufenacet	Herbicide	>100	>100	Data excluded from analysis
Flupicicolide	Fungicide	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Flupyradifurone	Fungicide	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Fluroxypyr	Herbicide	37,1		3
Flutolanil	Fungicide	>200		Data excluded from analysis
Fluxapyroxad	Fungicide	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Folpet	Fungicide	>100	>100	Data excluded from analysis
Foramsulfuron	Herbicide	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Forchlorfenuron	Plant growth regulator	>80,6		1119
Formetanate	Insecticide, Acaricide	0,16	2,55	8
Fosetyl-aluminium	Fungicide	>100	>250	Data excluded from analysis
Fosthiazate	Soil disinfectant, Insecticide, Nematicide	0,256		10,3
Garlic oil	Nematicide, Insecticide	>500		Data excluded from analysis
Geraniol+Thymol	Fungicide, Insecticide	>200		Data excluded from analysis
Giberellic acid	Herbicide, Plant growth regulator	>25		0,31
Glyphosate ⁴	Herbicide	>100	>100	Data excluded from analysis
Haloxifen-methyl	Herbicide	>98,1		43
Halosulfuron-methyl	Herbicide	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Hydrolyzed proteins	Insect traps	Data not available		Data not available
Hymexazol	Fungicide	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Imazalil	Fungicide	35,1	>67,7	6,4
Imazoxon	Herbicide	>40		16,7
Iodosulfuron-methyl-sodium	Herbicide	>80	>100	3,2
Iprovalicarb	Fungicide	>199		Data excluded from analysis
Isotefamid	Fungicide	>30		32,7
Isoxaben	Herbicide	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Isoxalutole	Herbicide	>100		Data excluded from analysis

ACTIVE SUBSTANCE	FUNCTION	LD ₅₀ TOPICAL/ORAL (µg/BEE)		DT ₅₀ (IN-FIELD SOIL / TYPICAL)
		<i>Apis mellifera</i>	Other bees	
Kresoxim-methyl	Fungicide	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Lambda-cyhalothrin	Insecticide	0,038	>0,032	26,9
Laminarin	Elicitor	>100		Data excluded from analysis
<i>Lecanicillium muscarium</i>	Insecticide	>110*		Data excluded from analysis
Lenacil	Herbicide	>206,2	>195,4	Data excluded from analysis
Maleic hydrazide	Plant growth regulator	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Maltodextrin	Acaricide, Insecticide	>200		Data excluded from analysis
Mandestrobin	Fungicide	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Mandioproamid	Fungicide	>200		Data excluded from analysis
MCPA	Herbicide	>200		Data excluded from analysis
Mecoprop-P	Herbicide	>83		21
Mefentrifluconazole	Fungicide	>100	>195,4	Data excluded from analysis
Mepanipyrim ⁵	Fungicide	51	>100	57
Mepylidnolacop	Fungicide	84,8		15
Mesosulfuron-methyl	Herbicide	>100	>100	Data excluded from analysis
Mesotrione	Herbicide	>11		5
Metaflumizone	Insecticide	1,65		13,8
Metabasal	Fungicide	200		Data excluded from analysis
Metabasal-M	Fungicide	>97,3		14,1
Metaldelhyde	limacida	>87,5		5,1
Metam-potassium	Pre-plant soil sterilant	Data not available		0,01
Metam-sodium	Soil disinfectant	>36,2		7
Metamitron	Herbicide	>97,2		11,1
<i>Metarhizium anisopliae</i>	Insecticide	>6000*		Data not available
Metazachlor	Herbicide	>72,2		6,8
Metconazole	Fungicide	85	>100	134,7
Methoxyfenozide ⁶	Insecticide	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Metobromuron	Herbicide	119,1		Data excluded from analysis
Metrafenone	Fungicide	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Metribuzin ⁷	Herbicide	>76,7	>100	19
<i>Metschnikowia fructicola</i> strain NRRL Y 27328	Fungicide	>250		Data excluded from analysis
Metsulfuron-methyl	Herbicide	>44,3		13,3
Milbectin	Acaricide	0,025	>9,7	8,5
Naphthylacetamide	Plant growth regulator	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Naphthylacetic acid	Plant growth regulator	>120		Data excluded from analysis
Napropamide	Herbicide	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Nettle extract	Insecticide, Acaricide, Fungicide	Data not available		Data not available
Nicosulfuron	Herbicide	>22,4	>35,96	13,5
Orange oil	Insecticide	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Oxathiapiprolin	Fungicide	>40,26		71,3
Oxyfluorfen	Herbicide	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Pacloutrazole	Plant growth regulator	>2		29,5
<i>Paeclomyces fumosoroseus</i> - strain F9901	Insecticide	Data not available		Data not available
<i>Paeclomyces illacinus</i> strain 251	Nematicide	Data not available		Data not available
Paraffin oil	Herbicide adjuvant	>95,5		Data not available
Pelargonic acid	Herbicide	122,1		Data excluded from analysis
Penconazole	Fungicide	>3		89,7
Pendimethalin	Herbicide	100		100,6
Penoxsulam	Herbicide	>100	>72,6	Data excluded from analysis
Penthiopyrad	Fungicide	>500		Data excluded from analysis
Pethoxamid	Herbicide	>200	>200	Data excluded from analysis
Phenmedipham	Herbicide	>100	>100	Data excluded from analysis
Pinoxaden	Herbicide	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Pirimicarb	Insecticide	4	8,5	9
Pirimiphos-methyl ⁸	Insecticide, Acaricide	>0,22		39
Potassium bicarbonate	Fungicide	>368		Data excluded from analysis
Potassium phosphonate	Fungicide	>145		Data excluded from analysis
Prohexadione calcium	Plant growth regulator	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Propamocarb	Fungicide	>84		14
Propaquizafop	Herbicide	>20		85

TOXICITY HIGH MEDIUM LOW

ACTIVE SUBSTANCE	FUNCTION	LD ₅₀ TOPICAL/ORAL (µg/BEE)		DT ₅₀ (IN-FIELD SOIL / TYPICAL)
		<i>Apis mellifera</i>	Other bees	
Propoxycarbazono	Herbicide	>200		Data excluded from analysis
Propylamido	Herbicide	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Proquinadiz	Fungicide	>125		Data excluded from analysis
Prosulfuron	Herbicide	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Prosulfocarb	Herbicide	>80		9,8
Prothioconazole	Fungicide	>71	>100	0,77
<i>Pseudomonas chlororaphis</i> strain MA342	Fungicide	Data not available		Data not available
<i>Pseudomonas</i> sp. strain DSMZ 13134	Fungicide	Low		Data excluded from analysis
Pyraclostrobin	Fungicide	>100	>97,2	Data excluded from analysis
Pyraflufen-ethyl	Herbicide	>100		Data excluded from analysis
Pyrethrin	In			