



USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

# GAIN Report

Global Agriculture Information Network

Template Version 2.09

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**Date:** 4/23/2008

**GAIN Report Number:** IT8013

## Italy

### Agricultural Situation

#### Bee Deaths in Italy

**2008**

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**Report Highlights:**

Report updates information reported in GAIN IT7024.

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Includes PSD Changes: No  
Includes Trade Matrix: No  
Trade Report  
Rome [IT1]  
[IT]

Italian beekeepers and environmentalists are once again sounding the alarm regarding the unprecedented deaths of more than 40,000 bees over the last few months. In 2007, the population dropped by 50 percent. Industry representatives maintain that the decline in the bee population is primarily due to the use of pesticides. According to UNAAPI, Italian National Union of Beekeepers, the latest disaster to hit the nation's honeybee population has coincided with the planting of maize. While drought and disease could also be factors, the key suspect remains insecticide and the use of artificial forms of nicotine called neonicotinoids. Neonicotinoids is used for seed treatment.

It is estimated that in 2007, approximately 200,000 beehives disappeared in Italy causing a massive drop in honey output, with agricultural damages over 250 million Euro. The Italian regions most affected by bee deaths are Piedmont and Lombardy, however, there have been bee deaths also in Veneto, Emilia Romagna, Tuscany and the center-north regions.

During the 1990's France severely limited the use of neonicotinoids following a large loss of bees. However, Italy has yet to ban/limit the use of neonicotinoids. The Italian Ministry of Agriculture is presently reviewing the possibility of issuing a moratorium on neonicotinoids, including a constant monitoring of the situation.

Meanwhile, UNAAPI has also urged the Italian Government to petition the EU for a European assessment on the impact of chemical substances on bees. According to UNAAPI, Italy accounts for 33% of the total amount of insecticide used each year in the EU, but has less than 10% of EU farm land.

The impact of recent bee deaths on agriculture in Italy could be very serious. According to Italy's leading agricultural union, Coldiretti, a third of all farming produce depends on insect pollination, of which 80% is carried out by bees. Coldiretti has noted that, "Should bees disappear it would not only destroy Italy's 25 million Euro honey industry but also affect most fruit crops, including apples, pears, almonds, peaches, kiwi, chestnuts, tomatoes, zucchini, soy, cherries, melons and citrus fruit." The Italian bee industry is worth 1.6 billion Euro annually, with each hive generating about 1,240 Euro. Coldiretti has even gone so far as to ask the Italian government to revoke accords to test nine crops created with genetically modified organisms (GMOs), claiming that use of GMOs could be contributing to the demise of the native bee population.