Treated Seed: Myths vs. Facts

Treated seed gives farmers an economical and sustainable way to protect their yield potential. Seed treatments have also become an important topic of discussion among regulators and consumers. Recently, the American Seed Trade Association (ASTA) addressed common misconceptions about seed treatments. As the selling season begins, these talking points might be useful for speaking to farmers or other stakeholders about the value of seed treatments.
Scan the QR code and download your own copy of the Myths vs. Facts resource.

1

MYTH: Treated seeds aren't necessary.

FACT: Without seed treatments, farmers would need to revert to more intensive and costly ag practices to achieve the same results—requiring more tillage, fewer cover crops and more foliar sprays. Treated seeds enable farmers to maximize yields with remarkably small and measured amounts of pesticides applied precisely where they are needed the most.

2

MYTH: Treated seeds aren't regulated.

FACT: Crop protection components of treated seeds are highly regulated—twice. First, the pesticide must be studied and reviewed for use as a seed treatment by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), then the seeds are regulated by state and federal agencies. All pesticide products used as seed treatments continue to be reviewed by regulatory agencies for as long as they are sold. Along with both U.S. and state agency reviews, all treated seed packaging includes a use label, and the seed industry actively promotes proper use and stewardship.

3

MYTH: Treated seeds aren't safe.

FACT: To receive approval, all pesticide products used as seed treatments must be proven safe to the environment, consumers, applicators and farmers. The highly targeted nature of seed treatments helps further minimize potential risks to the environment. Regulations mandate that anyone who treats or handles treated seeds manage them properly and according to label instructions to minimize risk of pesticide exposure to humans and the environment.

4

MYTH: Treated seeds are a threat to bees.

FACT: While there have been fluctuations in honeybee colony numbers over the past decades, and higher annual losses of honeybee colonies in some regions more recently, U.S. beekeepers list Varroa mites and the diseases they spread as the main reason for honeybee colony losses. The reality is that honeybee colonies are actually on the rise. In fact, in January 2021, the U.S. Department of Agriculture reported that colonies were up 2% from the past year and that colonies lost with colony collapse disorder symptoms were down by 27%.[1] Recent reports from the states of Washington and Vermont confirm the safety of seed treatments to pollinators.[2,3] To support ongoing efforts to ensure pollinator safety, the industry publishes guidelines, including the Protect Pollinators Checklist.

5 MYTH: Treated seeds are "exempt" from regulation.

FACT: Each farm and farmer are unique, and farmers always have a choice when it comes to what's best for their land and their businesses. The majority of farmers choose to use treated seed because of the tremendous value it provides—not only in boosting yield and reducing pesticide applications, but also in supporting sustainable agriculture practices on the farm. Additionally, many organic farmers can choose to use biological-based seed treatments.

6 MYTH: Treated seeds don't have guidelines for handling.

FACT: You may have heard of the so-called "treated article exemption." The reality is, treated seeds are anything but "exempt" from regulation. In fact, they're regulated twice—by both EPA and by state and federal seed control agencies. Additionally, all pesticides are subject to periodic review to ensure that, as the science advances and/or policies and pesticide use practices change over time, all registered products continue to meet the statutory standard.

7 MYTH: Treated seeds don't have guidelines for handling.

FACT: Industry and growers take treated seed stewardship extremely seriously. This includes a commitment to following proper steps for handling seed throughout its entire life cycle to reduce its environmental impact and to ensure it does not enter the grain supply. ASTA and CropLife America, along with seed companies, seed treatment providers, universities and other stakeholder groups, have developed a robust set of recommendations—and conduct regular education and outreach—to assist farmers and others involved with best practices and processes for on-farm treating, handling, transporting and planting of treated seeds. **Learn more at: seed-treatment-guide.com.**

[1] "January 1 Honey Bee Colonies Up 2 Percent for Operations with Five or More Colonies." USDA. August 2, 2021. https://downloads.usda.library.cornell.edu/usda-esmis/files/rn301137d/kh04fx05c/qb98nn582/hcny0822.pdf.

[2] "2021 Protection of Pollinator Health: Pollinators and Neonicotinoids." Washington State Department of Agriculture. December 2021. https://www.betterseed.org/wp-content/uploads/Washington-State-NEONIC-PollinatorHealth-2021-ReportToLegislature.pdf.

[3] Giguere, Cary, Morgan Griffith and Brooke Decker. "Surface Water Monitoring for Neonicotinoids 2017-2021." Vermont Agency of Agriculture Food & Markets. February 3, 2022. https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2022/WorkGroups/House%20Agriculture/Bills/H.626/Witness%20Documents/H.626~Morgan%20Griffith~Surface%20Water%20Monitoring%20for%20Neonicotinoids%20Presentation~2-3-2022.pdf.