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Concerns: potential impact of Pepino Mosaic Virus on bumble bees

Ever since pioneering the rearing and commercialization of bumblebees for use in tomato pollination 25 years ago, Biobest has grown steadily and remains a world leader in the production of beneficial insects. While the headquarters and the European production of bumblebees remain in Belgium, Biobest now produces and sells bumblebees worldwide. Still, 80% of our bumblebees are used in tomatoes, where the bees exclusively forage on this particular crop for the full lifecycle of the colony.

As such it is vital for our company to stay abreast of any development in tomato production and its potential impact on our pollinators. When Pepino Mosaic Virus started to become a serious issue in European tomato production more than a decade ago, we made sure that we scrutinized affected producers to assess if the virus would have any discernible effect on the performance of our bumblebees or on colony development. In none of these instances did we notice any deviation against our quality control standards, nor in comparison to colonies in non-affected crops. In addition, over the many years that the virus has now been widely present in our main European markets, we have never received any feedback from growers or technical staff regarding possible negative effects. As such, I am confident to state that PepMV has no effect whatsoever on bumble bees. This is also in full agreement with the specificity of this plant virus and everything we know about non-target effects of this and other plant viruses.

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