

Alberta Honey Makers fined for using unregistered pest controls to combat mite infestations

BY KRISTIN ANNABLE, EDMONTON JOURNAL MAY 27, 2013



File photo of a hive swarming with bees.

Photograph by: ROUF BHAT, AFP/Getty Images

EDMONTON - Attempts by two farmers to stop mites from invading their beehives resulted in a hefty fine from Health Canada.

Russell Severson of Camrose and Miedema Honey Farm Inc. of Barrhead were fined after they used unregistered pest control products in their beehives. The active ingredient in both cases was amitraz, an insecticide that is approved for use in Canada, but only in registered products. It is found in flea and tick collars for dogs.

The owner of Miedema Honey Farm Inc., Folkert Miedema, said he used the product Tactic, which is sold in Australia as a way to combat the mites.

“It is used all over the United States and beekeepers in Canada use it too,” Miedema said, mentioning that it was beekeepers in the U.S that recommended it to him. The product has not been approved for use in either country.

Beekeepers nationwide feel the sting of mite infestation every year. Grant Hicks, president of the

Alberta Beekeepers Commission, said mite infestations are the cause of roughly half of bee deaths every winter.

“If you get a mite on even one per cent of your bees, within two years you would lose the entire hive,” he said.

Since the mid-1990s when the Varroa mite made its way to Canada, beekeepers have tried to combat them. Products are developed to ward off the mites, but within a few seasons the mites become resistant to them. In his 35 years of farming, Hicks said the industry has gone through three antidotes, the latest being amitraz.

Miedema said after using Taktic this season, the product was much more effective than what was approved for use in Canada.

Health Canada’s Pesticide Compliance Program issued Miedema two violations; one a \$4,000 fine for the use of an unregistered product and the other for importing a product that contained thymol. Six notices of violation were handed out to Severson for a total fine of \$31,200 for using an unregistered product.

Alberta houses 43 per cent of Canada’s bees and is the fifth-largest honey producer in the world. With 850 beekeepers taking care of 282,000 hives, issues of non-compliance with federal law have to be taken seriously, Alberta provincial apiculturist Medhat Nasr said.

“Some of these guys use word of mouth and don’t know how much of the product to apply and how to handle pesticides,” he said. “The danger is in three things: risk for the applicators themselves, risk for the honey, and risk for the bees.”

The honey industry in Canada is small and for that reason there has not been enough research into finding alternatives to combat these infestations, Hicks said.

As a farmer for 32 years Miedema just wants to find a way to produce his honey effectively.

“We can’t live without bees, bees are very important, so we are trying to do the best we can do.”

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