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Beekeepers still waiting on border issue

Posted 41 mins ago by [Shannon VanRaes](#) in **Crops**



Last winter's losses — upwards of 65 per cent — were unprecedented and may be a one-off. But beekeepers are fearful of a repeat. (Photo: Thinkstock)

Many honey producers suffered huge losses last winter and could cut replacement costs by two-thirds if they could import American bees

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That's the message many Manitoba beekeepers will be giving the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, which is currently conducting a risk assessment of such a move, once they're asked for their opinion.

"We were hoping they would be into the external phase where they start to consult with us, but that should have been done in July and we're still waiting," said Allan Campbell, president of the Manitoba Beekeepers Association.

Like many other beekeepers, Campbell said he's hoping American bee packages will be available this winter to assist producers still rebuilding their hives after severe losses last winter.

He said some honey producers in the Gilbert Plains are down more than 1,000 hives, while other areas saw losses of about 45 per cent. Importing worker bees would greatly help the rebuilding, said Campbell.

"It wouldn't be a perfect world, but it would be a big step in the right direction," he said.

Producers are currently purchasing bee packages — a queen and about a kilogram of worker bees — from New Zealand, Chile and Australia for about \$150 each.

American packages sell for about \$55, but the border was effectively closed in 1987 following concerns about mites in U.S. bee populations.

The first draft of the risk assessment is complete and undergoing an internal review, said a spokeswoman for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, adding it's not known when it will be ready for public comment.

The matter needs to be moved along, said Ron Kostyshyn, minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, who raised the issue with federal Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz this spring.

"It's definitely an interest of mine and the government that we



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find alternative mechanisms to assist the bee producers so we don't have a reoccurrence of this," Kostyshyn said.

Last winter's losses — upwards of 65 per cent — was unprecedented and may be a one-off. But beekeepers are fearful of a repeat, said Campbell.

"If we could find out what is causing this, it would help," he said. "I mean, we still don't have any answers."

Kostyshyn said producers shouldn't forget that winter bee deaths are insurable through the Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation.

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