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ENVIRONMENT: Restricting use of the controversial pesticide, blamed for the deaths of millions of bees, would lower crop yields according to a study

Conference Board of Canada report puts cost of banning neonicotinoids in hundreds of millions of dollars

By Jennifer Bieman, John Miner, The London Free Press
Thursday, July 10, 2014 9:09:44 EDT PM



Restricting a common but controversial pesticide blamed for the deaths of millions of bees could deliver a \$630-million sting to Ontario corn and soybean farmers, a new study warns.

And if those two big cash-crop groups — huge in Southwestern Ontario — are hit, consumers could also feel a welt in their wallets for food basics as the law of supply and demand kicks in.

In yet another sign the debate about neonicotinoids and the collapse of bee colonies is only growing, the Conference Board of Canada costed the fallout of restrictions on using the family of pesticides in a study paid for by the Grain Farmers of Ontario and CropLife Canada, a pest-control industry group.

Limiting use of so-called neonics — commonly applied as a coating on seeds to protect plants — would reduce crop yields and drive up costs for farmers, the study concludes.

An outright ban on the inexpensive pesticide would cost growers \$700 to \$90,000, depending on the size of their farms — a hit many would have to eat.

The move would give an advantage to U.S. farmers and put some Ontario farmers out of business.

Others would be forced to scale back their operations, the board's report said.

"Thousands of Ontario grain farmers already operate on slim margins," it noted.

Held out by environmentalists as more toxic to bees than the 1970s-era pesticide DDT was to birds, neonics are already banned in Europe and under growing scrutiny by regulators in Canada.

This year, Canada's federal regulator ordered tougher planting season rules to reduce bee losses.

And Ontario — it can't ban the pesticide, only sales of it — appears moving to restrict its use. Agriculture Minister Jeff Leal says he wants Ontario to "move away from the widespread, indiscriminate use" of neonics and develop a system by 2015 to ensure they're used only where there's "demonstrated need."

Critical to plant pollination, bees were especially hard hit last year in Ontario, Quebec and Manitoba, with beekeepers pointing to the family of pesticides as the smoking gun.

Seed and chemical companies disagree, saying their products are tested and aren't the killer.

Opponents of a ban suggest a tiny mite — not the chemicals — is the culprit for collapsing bee colonies.

The Ontario Beekeepers' Association wants to promote more discretionary use of the pesticide by lobbying for a ban on seeds pre-treated with neonicotinoids.

"That is the balance we see happening," Dan Davidson, the association's president, said.

"Hopefully, that gets the usage down enough that it is a lot better for our bees."

But talk of restricting neonic use isn't welcome by many farm groups, including Grain Farmers of Ontario.

A ban or partial ban would only ignore steps farmers already take to control the pesticide, said Barry Senft, the group's chief executive.

Instead, he said, he'd like to see joint research with beekeepers.

"The ideal situation would be working closely together on bee health and not just saying that neonicotinoids are the sole issue of bee deaths in Ontario," he said.

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NEONICOTINOIDS

A common family of pesticides, typically applied as a seed coating.

Protect plants from insects.


Most corn and half the soybean crop is treated.

Use also permitted in greenhouses.

Blamed by many for bee die-offs, which pesticide industry rejects.

Banned in Europe, under growing scrutiny in Canada.

Federal regulator found neonic residue in 75% of dead bees tested.

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**Whyme3** • a month ago

IF, it has been proven that "neonics" has or is causing the death of honey bees, then I can agree with the ban. However, there was a story a short time back about how some bee hives out west were thriving - even though the farmers in the area were using "neonics" on their seeds. Can we see some proof as to what is actually causing the bees to die off? Is this just happening in Ontario or elsewhere as well?

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**Voice_InTheWind** → Whyme3 • a month ago

Yes - supposedly Canola seeds have been neonic treated for some time now, lots of interaction with Bees and apparently the western bee colonies are doing just fine.. As I said below - we need some very good science on this issue - not just the rantings from green peace wannabees (pun intended)

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**Will Panos** → Voice_InTheWind • a month ago

Canola requires a lesser amount of this neurotoxin than corn or soy, the bees are moved there well after planting for 2 to 3 weeks and then moved out which gives them a chance to detoxify. This is the reason why Bayer convinced the US EPA to allow them to run their field safety studies using a few acres of Canola. Same thing is going on in Australia it's just a distraction used by Bayer Cropscience and Syngenta.

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**timeon_myhands** → Voice_InTheWind • a month ago

That's OK Voice let's just cruise along until it's too late to react then we can BUY copyrighted and patented "Bayer Bees" to pollinate our GMO crops!

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**Silvester21** → Whyme3 • a month ago

Can it be proved that neonics provide any advantage? Some people will believe anything. I wonder if farmers will be upset if they find out they've been duped

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**Voice_InTheWind** • a month ago

I really want to defer to "good" science on this one... For instance the picture of dead bees attached to this article was clearly from a wasp attack - should we ban all wasps ? Science needs to determine the best solution towards restoring "bee" health. And a knee jerk reaction back to having our fields dripping with older more deadly pesticides might not be the answer. Clearly, neonics in too great of a quantity is a problem. Have the steps taken to eliminate the dust been effective ? Could weaker, or less long lasting versions of the product be effective ? Outright bans on products sometimes have unexpected side effects as well - For instance, deaths due to Malaria jumped dramatically after the ban of DDT - so much so, that DDT use has been reinstated in many areas.

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**Silvester21** → Voice_InTheWind • a month ago

Ever wonder how man survived before neonics and it must be absolutely impossible for the organic farmers to grow a crop. The thing is neonics are really not necessary. You are brainwashed if you think so

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**timeon_myhands** → Voice_InTheWind • a month ago

Testing should be completed and approved by a country's dept. of health BEFORE a product is allowed to be used. Canada has abandoned much of its testing facilities and relies on the U. S. which is obviously under the thumb of multinationals.

The knee jerk reaction is exactly what is needed here for everyone's sake !

BTW; Good eye on the wasp in the bee hive, but lazy journalism can't be compared to lazy public protection.

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