

Letter to the Editor

Recent articles have tended to indicate that all beekeepers are calling for a ban on neonicatoid seed treatments and that is far from the truth. The Canadian Honey Council is made up of the membership of all provincial beekeeper associations and takes a national rather than regional perspective on issues that impact beekeepers. Two of our member associations, the Ontario Beekeeper Association and the Federation des Apiculteurs du Quebec have publicly asked their respective governments to ban neonicatoid seed treatments. This strategy has yet to be adopted by the majority of members of the Canadian Honey Council as it has preferred a different course of action to protect beekeeper interests.

The Canadian Honey Council has spent a great deal of time and energy addressing the matter of neonicotinoids and the dusting events of 2012 in Quebec and Ontario. While initial claims were directed to towards an incident, more recent claims are being targeted towards the systemic nature of the pesticide and its sub-lethal impacts. In 2012, at the request of the OBA, the CHC formed a Bee Incident committee which has put forward a number of recommendations of which can be found on our website. These recommendations represent a national, cooperative perspective and were vetted by all Board members and approved by every provincial representative. The committee took the view that cooperation and association with all those involved in the agricultural sector will yield greater benefits for beekeepers versus an adversarial approach. In turn, the CHC Board did not attempt to interfere with the actions that individual associations were taking. It must be said that the members of the CHC have considerable sympathy for the beekeepers that were, and are, being impacted by corn seed treatments. Those beekeepers who are situated in and around the nearly 3.3 million acres of feed corn grown in Ontario and Quebec are experiencing situations that other beekeepers from across Canada have either chosen not to report or are not necessary experiencing. It is hoped that as beekeepers awareness of acute and sub-lethal effects of pesticide poisoning are better understood and identified, more beekeepers will be come forward.

Yet, the fact remains that last year, that there was over 21.3 million acres of seed treated canola planted in Canada and there were no reported incidents of neonicotinoid poisoning. In addition, there were millions of other acres planted with crops that use the seed treatments such as soybeans, and again, no reported incidents, at least none that the CHC is aware of.

While the sub-lethal impacts may be proven in these crops, they have not been evident to date, at least in widely accepted scientific form. While it may seem contrary to some, we have been working with CropLife Canada in putting forward information, BMP and IPM recommendations to minimize the risk. We have been working with, and gathering information from national commodity organizations like the Grain Growers of Canada, the Canola Council of Canada and the Grain Growers of Ontario all of whom are directly impacted by seed treatments. We have been working with the equipment manufacturers association, the PMRA, and other interested parties all in an effort to ensure beekeepers needs and representations are effectively heard and recognized. We also have been looking at the alternatives should a national ban or moratorium be placed on neonicotinoids, its impacts on beekeepers across the country as well as the impact it would have on our fellow agricultural producers.

As a national organization we are aware that there are a vast array of interests and opinions and try as we might to support all provincial actions, sometimes the national perspective needs to take precedent. The CHC will continue to work toward getting answers, whether it be through sponsoring additional research as with the Corn Dust Research Consortium, working with the PMRA in ensuring the PMRA investigation covers all the necessary bases, working with the chemical companies urging them to develop more pollinator friendly products, working with farmers in engaging their awareness of the importance of bees and most importantly, working for and with beekeepers, ensuring that their livelihood is nurtured, protected and sustained.

