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## NEWS LOCAL

# Ontario beekeepers sue pesticide manufacturers



By Cheryl Browne, Barrie Examiner  
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Peter Dickey of Dickey Bee Honey Inc. looks over a frame of honey ready for extraction at their Cookstown facility Wednesday. Peter will be joining a \$450-million proposed class-action lawsuit that has been filed against Bayer Inc. on behalf of two large family-owned Ontario honey producers. Mark Wanzel/The Barrie Examiner/QMI Agency

By their deaths, the bees have spoken.

A class-action lawsuit by several large Ontario beekeepers has set the ball in motion for the rest of the province's honey producers to fight back against the neonicotinoid pesticides farmers use when planting their crops.

By all accounts, millions, perhaps billions, of bees have died in the last decade since the introduction of the pesticide dust-coated grain, soy and corn crops that while killing off crop pests has also turned into a death sentence for bees.

"The whole neonicotinoids thing has been a fiasco since the early 2000s, pretty much as soon as they came out on the market," said Bernie Wiehle, spokesman for the Ontario Beekeepers Association (OBA).

"Many different beekeepers have been talking to lawyers in the last two months," he added. "We knew we had to do something because we weren't getting anywhere with the federal government."

The plaintiff, Sun Parlor Honey, has been in operation for 90 years in both Essex and North Wellington counties.

In the statement of claim, Sun Parlor estimates it lost approximately \$2 million in bee hives and another \$718,200 from the shortage of almost 140,000 pounds of honey.

Another plaintiff, Munro Honey of Alvinston Ont., near Sarnia, is claiming it lost more than \$3 million in lost hives and honey.

Together, they are seeking \$450 million in damages.

In the statement of claim, the plaintiffs allege that "Bayer (Crop Science) and Syngenta were negligent in their manufacture, sale and distribution of neonicotinoids in Ontario that caused beekeepers to suffer significant losses and damage. These losses included killed or weakened bees; non-productive queens and bee colonies; breeding stock; contaminated wax, combs and hives; reduced honey production and lost profits; costs incurred to meet honey and pollination contracts and increased labour, equipment and supply expenses."

"While the OBA is not directly involved in this action, we support any effort that could help beekeepers recover losses caused by the overuse of neonicotinoids," said Tibor

Szabo of the OBA. "This action puts the blame where it belongs – on the pesticide manufacturers."

Neonicotinoids are considered to be systemic chemicals that work their way up the initially sprayed seed through the plant and attack the nervous system of any insect that comes into contact with the plant.

The link between neonicotinoid use and colony loss has been confirmed by Health Canada, but the agency has refrained from banning the insecticides.

In its 2012 evaluation, Health Canada noted "current agricultural practices related to the use of neonicotinoid-treated corn and soybean seed are not sustainable due to their impact on bees and other pollinators."

Last year, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) stated neonicotinoids are used on 100% of canola crops, 99% on corn crops, 95% on dry beans, 65% on soybeans and 25-33% on cereal acreages.

Health Canada officials have said they will monitor the situation, said Sandi Dickey, co-owner of Dickey Bee Honey in Cookstown.

"When you hear that from a politician..." Dickey said, "We knew it (the class-action lawsuit) was coming down the pipe. We're all going to join it, we're all involved."

Dickey's husband, Peter, is president of the Huronia Beekeepers Association. The Dickey Bee Honey farm has approximately nine million bees and figure they've seen about a 35% loss. Without the neonicotinoids, an annual loss of 10-15% is expected, he said.

"We're doing OK, considering the provincial average is about 48% loss," he said.

But honey producers in Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia and Quebec have all reported major bee deaths since 2012.

Dickey said he doesn't blame farmers for spraying their crops. He's been told by local farmers they can't get untreated seed if they wanted to. He insists if the government wanted to help, it would ban the use of neonicotinoids.

"Ban the damn thing outright and give us a couple of years to see how the bees respond," Dickey said. "Then if you have to, bring it back under permit only."

Representing the bee producers in the lawsuit, lawyer Paula Lombardi of Siskinds LLP said she has received many calls from Ontario beekeepers since the class-action lawsuit notice was released Wednesday.

She's not sure how many names will join the initial plaintiffs before they reach certification of the class-action lawsuit next year.

But she says this is clearly a case of the pharmaceutical and agricultural companies knowing –

or ought to have known – their products have been responsible for the death of so many bees.

"Internationally, a substantive amount of information was coming out about the harm it's been having on the bee population and we're saying that they, Bayer and Syngenta, ought to have known what would happen," Lombardi said.

#### QUICK FACTS

Neonicotinoids are a class of insecticide products manufactured and sold by Bayer and Syngenta that contain imidacloprid, clothianidin and/or thiamethoxam.

Internationally, steps have been taken to ban their use, including:

- 1999 – France banned the use of Bayer's imidacloprid
- 2008 – Italy suspended the use of pesticides containing neonicotinoids for the coating of any seeds
- 2008 – Germany suspended the registration of eight pesticide treatments, including clothianidin
- 2009 – a European task force on systemic pesticides concluded neonicotinoids pose a serious risk of harm to honey bees and other pollinators
- 2013 – The European Food Safety Authority restricted the sale and use of neonicotinoid insecticides, specifically products containing clothianidin, imidacloprid and thiamethoxam
- 2013 – Japan refused to accept Canadian buckwheat grown in 2012 because it exceeded their maximum residue limit for thiamethoxam

Source: Sun Parlor Honey statement of claim

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Cuchulain • 2 months ago

Our different levels of government continue to accept political donations from all the big petro-chemical companies, all the while assuring us that in another couple of years we will have narrowed down the search for the answers to one of the most alarming pollinator die offs in history. The "elephant in the room" of course is the fact that the petro-chemical corporations themselves are conducting and funding the "studies." Our federal government has long since made it clear to our scientists that they will receive no funding for studies that the powers that be, don't wish to hear about.

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Al Truistic • 2 months ago

One thing missing from the article is that neonicotinoids are primarily used on genetically modified (GMO) crops because neonicotinoids don't damage the genetically modified plant only the insects who may land on it. But ... Bayer, Syngenta and Monsanto want us to believe there's nothing wrong with genetically modified foods that have substances that are designed to kill sprayed on them ...

Sad ...

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ThusSpokeZarathustra • 2 months ago

It's seems that Harper has got cobs of corn stuffed in his ears.

3 ^ | ▾ • Share ›

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