

Beekeeper blames fellow beekeepers for losses

Says poor management, not neonicotinoid pesticides to blame for deaths



Beekeeper blames fellow beekeepers for losses

FILE PHOTO

A local beekeeper says poor hive management is to blame for bee losses in the province not the use of neonicotinoid pesticides the Ontario government is looking at regulating.

Grimsby Lincoln News

By [Amanda Moore](#)

GRIMSBY — Whether neonicotinoid pesticides are toxic to bees is not up for debate.

Researchers agree on that fact. When bees are exposed to the chemical, their lives are threatened. What is up for debate, according to a top University of Guelph researcher who has spent years researching the impacts of neonics on honey bees, is whether or not their use presents an "unacceptable risk" to hives.

"The fact that neonics are toxic to bees is not debatable," said Dr. Cynthia Scott-Dupree, who is the environmental chair in the department of environmental science at the University of Guelph. "Neonicotinoid is an insecticide and bees are insects. The question is whether or not neonics will cause the demise of bees."

According to Scott-Dupree and a West Lincoln beekeeper, the answer to that question is no, despite a \$400-million lawsuit recently filed by Sun Parlor Honey Ltd. and Munro Honey, two of Ontario's largest honey producers, on behalf of all Canadian beekeepers, against Bayer CropScience Inc. and Syngenta Canada. The lawsuit alleges that Bayer, Syngenta and their parent companies were negligent in their design, manufacture, sale and distribution of neonicotinoid pesticides. The claimants are seeking \$400 million in damages alleging that the use of these pesticides in agriculture is causing bee colonies to collapse.

Neonicotinoid pesticides protect seed from worms and other insects that could otherwise destroy a crop. Bees and other insects are exposed to the pesticides in two ways: by consuming the pollen on treated crops or by ingesting pesticide-laden dust stirred up during the planting process. Several studies have linked the use of neonics to widespread bee losses. An evaluation by Health Canada in 2012, a year when bee loss was reported at 242 different bee yards in the province, found that neonicotinoid-treated corn contributed to the majority of the bee mortalities.

A West Lincoln beekeeper has a very different opinion on the matter. Walter Zimmermann of Little Wolf Apiaries says that poor management practices are to blame for bee deaths in this province. In the past three years the Caistor Centre farmer and beekeeper has not lost a single hive, which he credits to his stringent management practices.

"There are as many management styles as there are bee keepers in Canada," said Zimmermann. "Things will go wrong for people."

Zimmermann credits his hive health to his own management system which looks at factors like genetics, hygiene, disease and pest control.

"Management is a clock," said Zimmermann, "and beekeeping is all about timing."

"What the beekeepers are experiencing, they've brought on themselves."

Zimmermann grows corn treated with neonicotinoids next to hives. In the past three years he's had a bumper crop of corn and no impact on his hives. He said the Ontario government's intentions of regulating the use of neonicotinoid pesticides will have negative impacts on the farming world.

"Harm will come from this," he said.

The Ministry of Agriculture announced in the summer that it would hold stakeholder meetings with farmers, beekeepers and pesticide makers with the intent of developing a licensing system to be in place by next fall when seed orders are placed by farmers.

Scott-Dupree said despite reports from the United States and Europe there have been no cases of colony collapse disorder in Canada and that bee losses are actually on the decline. She said other causes blamed for the losses such as genetically modified crops, wifi signals and chemical trails are all unlikely causes of bee losses.

Scott-Dupree said a lack of crop diversity in Ontario could be one reason.

"Monoculture is very problematic," said Scott-Dupree, noting the majority of Ontario's farm lands have been planted with three main crops: corn, soy and wheat. "Bees like diversity in what they eat," she added noting the big three offer little by way of nutrition for bees.

Scott-Dupree said other factors such as parasitic varroa mites and viruses are also likely contributors to bee losses.

Scott-Dupree carried out field trials in 2012 on canola fields near Guelph, Ont. A total of 10, two-hectare fields were planted with canola — a crop high in bee-attracting pollen — 10 kilometres apart. Half of the fields were treated with neonics, half were not. Bees exposed to clothianidin, a Bayer neonicotinoid, produced virtually the same amount of honey as those in the untreated fields, said Scott-Dupree, who noted there were little effects of exposure visible from the research. Her study was recently published in a peer reviewed journal.