

Sweet: Canadian beekeepers happy about increased production, number of hives

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In this Jan. 28, 2014, file photo, a hive of honeybees appears on display at the Vermont Beekeeping Supply booth at the annual Vermont Farm Show at the Champlain Valley Expo in Essex Junction, Vt.

The Canadian beekeeping industry is buzzing over new numbers that show honey production is up. New figures from Statistics Canada show beekeepers produced 95.3 million pounds of honey in 2015, an increase of 11.4 per cent from the previous year. THE CANADIAN PRESS/AP Photo/Andy Duback

EDMONTON - The Canadian beekeeping industry is buzzing over new numbers that show honey production is up to its highest level in nine years.

New figures from Statistics Canada show beekeepers produced 95.3 million pounds of honey in 2015, an increase of 11.4 per cent from the previous year.

The total value of the sweet stuff is up by 10.9 per cent to \$232 million due to the increased production.

"The industry is successful and is growing. It really is a positive message," Rod Scarlett, executive director of the Canadian Honey Council said Wednesday.

The number of bee colonies increased by 3.6 per cent, largely due to milder temperatures last winter that reduced losses, mainly in the Prairies.

Scarlett said Canada has been bucking the trend of declines in bee numbers compared to other countries.

"We have been one of the few areas that stand out, in part because the beekeepers are more well versed in best management practises and how to handle problems that crop up."

Those problems include controlling Varroa mites, a parasite that attacks honey bees. The tiny bugs can kill off an entire colony.

The industry is also working on an action plan with the federal government to promote bee health including ways to reduce pesticide exposure in and outside the hive.

Scarlett said the biggest challenge facing the industry is competition for the key U.S. market from Argentina, which has also had a bumper crop of honey that is affecting prices.

Canada exports up to 70 per cent of its production, mainly to the U.S.

Alberta is the top honey producer in Canada and one of the largest in the world, with the majority of hives in and around the greater Edmonton area and the Peace River region.

Urban beekeeping is a growing trend, with more municipalities allowing people to try their hand with a hive or two.

Scarlett said there are beekeeper associations in major cities such as Vancouver, Montreal and Toronto.

The one in Toronto has more than 600 members.

"It is definitely not a commercial situation. Some are doing it for the environment. Some are doing it for the honey. Some are doing it because it is a great hobby."

There is also growing demand for bees to pollinate crops across Canada, he said.

According to Statistics Canada, Alberta produced 42.8 million pounds of honey this year, up 20.4 per cent from 2014.

There was also increased production in Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

The previous Canadian production high was 106.5 million pounds in 2006.

- See more at: <http://www.timescolonist.com/sweet-canadian-beekeepers-happy-about-increased-production-number-of-hives-1.2129795#sthash.CgDpRqHT.dpuf>