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Ontario bee colonies recovering

Mild winter helped reduce colony losses

Posted May. 5th, 2016 by [Robert Arnason](#)



After years of severe losses, Ontario bee colonies look great this spring as the vast majority of hives survived the winter.

On Tibor Szabo's beekeeping operation, near Moffat, Ont., essentially every hive is still alive. "I'm about 99 percent (survival)," said Szabo, Ontario Beekeepers' Association (OBA) president.

Winter losses weren't quite as low at Coneybeare Honey north of Fergus, Ont., but the bees are also in fantastic shape.

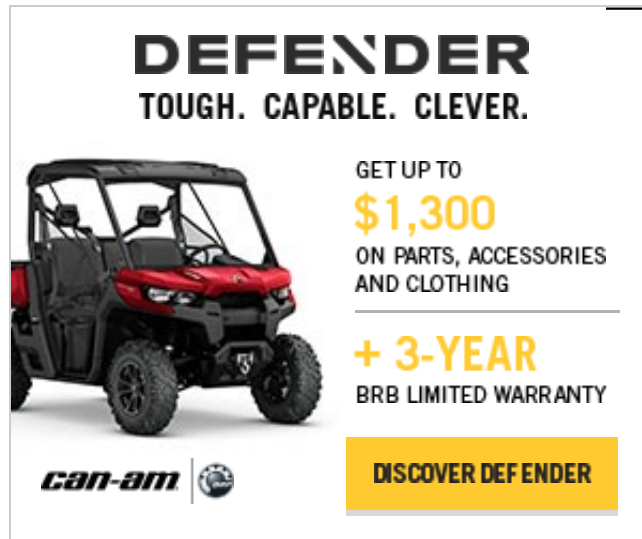
"We're probably around a 10 percent winter loss," said Jim Coneybeare. "I'm hearing from a lot of guys (beekeepers), probably a five to 10 percent winter loss."

If losses remain that low it will be a tremendous improvement from 2014 and 2015.

- Last year Ontario beekeepers lost 37.8 percent of their hives, much higher than the Canadian average of 16.4 percent.
- In 2014 winter losses were 58 percent in Ontario, compared to 25 percent across Canada.
- Winter losses are defined as the number of hives that are viable at the end of winter, compared to the number of bee colonies stored in the fall.

The primary reason for minimal losses this year was the warm fall and pleasant winter in Ontario, Szabo said.


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“With honeybees, strong hives are independent of the weather,” he said. “Hives with smaller populations are (more) dependent on the weather for growth and survival.... When you have a mild winter they all make it.”

The shorter winter also benefitted bees on the Prairies.

“Talking to beekeepers in Alberta, and my own bees, our (winter) survival has been much, much better,” said Stephen Pernal, Agriculture Canada bee expert at the Beaverlodge Research Farm. “Just by intuition, this is not based on looking at numbers, I would expect across Western Canada... that our winter survival rates will be better.”

It will be difficult for survival rates on the Prairies to get much better than 2015, when winter losses were around 11 percent.

The high survival rate in Ontario should provide a boost for province’s beekeeping industry, which provides pollination for orchard crops in Central Canada.

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“It’s definitely a shot in the arm.... Hopefully the high survival continues (through the summer),” Szabo said.

Bee winter losses have been a controversial topic in Ontario the last few years. Environmental groups and beekeepers have blamed neonicotinoid seed treatments, which are applied to corn, canola and soybean seeds, for killing bees and compromising colony health.

The winter losses, along with bee deaths caused by corn seeder dust contaminated with neonicotinoids in the springs of 2012 and 2013, provoked media and public outrage in Ontario. The provincial government responded with regulations restricting the use of neonicotinoids, where growers must prove they have a crop pest and get a licence to use a neonic seed treatment on corn and soybeans.

Entomologists have questioned the value of the regulations because pesticide exposure is just one of many, many factors that influence bee colony health.

“When we asked beekeepers what they consider to be the primary factors for the high losses, the number one reported answer was weather related, followed closely by problems with queens,” said Manitoba provincial apiarist Rheal Lafreniere.

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The Canadian Association of Professional Apiculturists releases estimates of bee winter losses in July.

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Symbol	Month	Open	Chg	%Chg	Last
ICE Canola	May	0.00	-1.00	-0.20%	494.70s
ICE Canola	Jul	499.80	-1.90	-0.38%	497.80
ICE Wheat	May	0.00	+1.00	+0.42%	238.00s
ICE Durum	May	0.00	-5.00	-1.65%	298.00s
ICE Barley	May	0.00	unch	unch	172.00s
MGEX Wheat	May	533-0	-3-6	-0.70%	531-0s
KCBT Wheat	May	444-0	-3-6	-0.84%	440-2s
CBOT Wheat	May	453-4	+0-4	+0.11%	453-4
CBOT Corn	May	372-2	+1-4	+0.40%	373-2
CBOT Oats	May	182-6	+2-0	+1.11%	182-6
CBOT Soybeans	May	1002-0	+2-0	+0.20%	1005-4
Soybean Meal	May	342.7	-8.0	-2.33%	335.0s
Soybean Oil	May	32.03	+0.02	+0.06%	32.03
CME Feeder Cattle	May	144.975	+3.025	+2.09%	147.950s
CME Live	Jun	117.775	+2.175	+1.85%	119.625s

Cattle					
CME Lean Hogs	May	77.850	+0.200	+0.26%	77.575s
CME Canadian Dollar	Jun	0.77750	-0.00150	-0.19%	0.77600

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