

Suppliers say bees died long after last spraying

Posted: Monday, July 11, 2016 12:00 am

This story was published in the Lewiston Tribune on July 23, 1976.

Trespassing apiarists have caused more damage by forcing insecticide bans than their dead bees are worth, two Lewiston pesticide distributors said Wednesday.

They added that recent bee kills in the lower Clearwater River Valley cannot be blamed on insecticides because no poisonous substances have been sprayed there for more than a month.

Vernon Storey and Roger Allison, co-owners of Mark Means Co., Inc., told the Lewiston Morning Tribune that no encapsulated parathion, which Idaho Agriculture Department officials have blamed for the mass deaths, has been sprayed in the lower Clearwater River Valley during that period.

And, Storey said, the farmers and aerial pesticide applicators are getting tired of being chastised for the bee deaths.

All beekeepers in the Lewiston area knew before they brought their insects to the valley that they would have to graze the bees on farmlands that are sprayed annually with insecticides, Storey said. Yet those apiarists, whose bees, Storey said, are trespassing on sprayed farmland to get the pollen they need for honey, are demanding that insecticides beneficial to the farmers be banned, he said.

Storey added that pea, lentil and rape fields, which provide most of the honey pollen in the Lewiston area, do not require insect pollination to produce seeds.

Therefore, he concluded, the apiarists need the farmers, but the farmers can do well without the beekeepers.

A ban on the use of encapsulated parathion, which was ordered by the state officials because of the bee kills, could be responsible for the crop damage this year, Storey said.

As an example, he said, parathion is the only chemical endorsed for application to rape fields to kill cabbage seed pod bores. Those tiny insects can devastate a rape field if they are not killed by insecticide, he added.

Since encapsulated parathion has been banned, the cabbage seed pod bores in Lewiston area rape fields have not been controlled, he said. He predicted that more monetary damage will be caused to rape fields this year by cabbage seed pod bores than all of the dead bees are worth. He made no estimates as to how much damage might be caused to pea and lentil fields because of the encapsulated parathion ban.

Allison said only parathion in its encapsulated form has been banned in Idaho. Other forms of parathion still are available for spraying he said.

He explained that heavy use of parathion started when DDT was banned. Parathion is a much stronger killer than DDT was, he said. But it does not last as long. DDT was effective for two or three weeks after it was sprayed. Parathion is effective about 24 hours.

Pesticide scientists discovered a method, however, to make the parathion last, he said. They inject the chemical into millions of microscopic plastic capsules. After the encapsulated parathion is sprayed the chemicals start oozing through the capsule.

The parathion continues to leak through the capsule for 10 to 20 days, Allison said. With the encapsulated form farmers must spray their fields only once during the year, rather than every day, which they would have to do with the non-encapsulated form of parathion.

The capsules are responsible for some of the bee deaths, Storey said. He explained that bees have been killed by parathion for years. However, they died in fields after touching the chemical in its raw form and were not seen again by apiarists.

This year, however, the bees have mistaken the microscopic capsules full of poison for pollen and carried them to the hives, Storey said. The parathion leaks out of the capsules into hive and kills all of the bees, leaving them laying in heaps outside of the hive. A stack of bees near the hives makes a bee kill more visible to the apiarist than a scattering of dead bees in a field, he added.

Storey discounted theories that the poison was either sprayed on the hives or drifted to the hives on the wind. Aerial applicators are constantly on the lookout for bee colonies and avoid them with the spray, he said. He added that kills were found in all directions and at all distances from sprayed fields, which would discount the wind drift theory.

Allsion said he has no doubts that pesticides -specifically encapsulated parathion - killed the bees this year. But that is not the fault of the farmers, the chemical companies or the aerial applicators, he emphasized. The beekeepers who sent their bees into sprayed fields are to blame for any death that occur, he said.

Yet the Idaho Agriculture Department, the federal Environmental Protection Agency and the press have constantly placed the blame on the people using the pesticides, Storey said.

"There is just something romantic about bees," Storey said, that fascinates the press and the state and federal officials and turns them to the side of the apiarists, "You know that old birds and the bees business."