



B.C. bee industry abuzz in big bucks



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In the past 10 years the value of bee cross-pollination has increased 70 per cent in the province. AP PHOTO/ ANDY DUBACK

Bees are bringing in big bucks to B.C.'s economy, generating \$500 million in activity, according to a new report by Vancity credit union.

The report, called Sweet Deal: The value of bees to B.C.'s economy, found that while retail sales for B.C. honey doubled from \$8 million to \$16 million between 2014 and 2015, the primary benefit of bees to our economy is a result of pollination, valued at \$468 million annually.

"Crop pollination is quite critical to our agricultural industry," said the report's author, Mark Winston, a Simon Fraser University professor and a bee biologist for 40 years. "Bees are absolutely essential. Without bees we wouldn't have certain vegetables, berries and oils."



A bee gathers honey from an orange blossom.JACK GUEZ/AFP / GETTY IMAGES

Winston said that in the past 10 years the value of bee cross-pollination has increased 70 per cent in the province. The report stated about one-third of North American food crops are pollinated by bees, and in B.C. most field-crop pollination is by managed honeybees, since wild bees aren't sufficient in number to pollinate effectively.

"Bee pollination is most valuable for blueberries among B.C. field crops, more than double the economic return of the next significant crop, sweet cherries. Apples, cranberries and raspberries round out the top-five, bee-pollinated field crops in British Columbia," the report states.

The report noted that while bee populations are declining worldwide as a result of pesticides, nutritional deficiencies, diseases and pests, in B.C. there's a growing interest, particularly among young people, to ensure honeybee survival.

"The level of interest has grown dramatically in the last 10 years. It's ironic when bees in particular have had problems worldwide," he said.

Winston said there has been a substantial increase in the number of people opting to become beekeepers. In B.C., he noted, the number of beekeepers jumped 35 per cent since 2009.

“Younger people looking for an opportunity to become farmers find it more economically feasible to buy a hive for a few hundred dollars compared to spending millions to buy land (to grow produce),” said Winston.



Tony Lovse with some of the many local honey products at Main Street Honey Shoppe. MARK VAN MANEN / PNG

Tony Lovse, owner of Main Street Honey Shoppe, said the product they sell is from Honeybee Centre, a commercial operation in Surrey that has been in business for the past 15 years. The Vancouver honey store, which opened three years ago, is also planning to sell honey from urban bee colonies in Vancouver, since some residents are asking for honey from their own neighbourhoods.

Lovse said there are 300 varieties of honey in North America, and locally some of the primary honey varieties include blueberry honey, cranberry honey, raspberry honey, wildflower honey, and clover and alfalfa honey.

“It’s a great industry and obviously a green industry that helps agriculture in a major way,” said Lovse.

But Winston said that despite the benefits of bees, many farmers continue to threaten their existence by using pesticides.

“Farming is a very conservative profession and they do things the way they’ve done it for years. There’s also a tremendous industry that’s grown-up lobbying for pesticides,” he said.

Winston said B.C. would be wise to follow the lead of Ontario and Quebec, which implemented stricter regulations regarding pesticides two years ago and has seen an 80-per-cent decrease in pesticide use over that time.

Among the report’s recommendations for individuals:

- Don’t mow lawns when nectar- and pollen-producing weeds are blooming, particularly dandelion and clover.
- Don’t use pesticide in yards.
- Plant gardens with flowers that attract bees, such as pea, beans, heather and rhododendrons, to name a few.

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