

# FARMERS FORUM

## **EASTERN ONTARIO: Crop advisors willing to do pest assessments for neonics few and far between**

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By Tom Collins

Good luck trying to find a crop advisor who will do a pest assessment for farms that want to use neonicotinoid-treated corn or soybean seeds. They're very hard to find.

With the province's phased-in ban on neonics, farmers wanting to use the neonic pesticide in Frontenac, Prince Edward, Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry counties will now need professional pest advisors to do the pest assessments. All other counties will be phased into the neonic ban over the next two years.

However, farmers in the five affected counties can still avoid paying for a pest advisor and still use neonic seeds for the 2018 planting season if they buy their seeds within one year of conducting their own pest assessment.

*Farmers Forum* made more than 20 phone calls and found a lone crop advisor willing to do the pest assessment for neonics. Only Lancaster's Munro Agromart, in South Glengarry, was willing to do assessments. They hadn't figured out the cost yet.

Alex Romon, a certified crop advisor with Munro Agromart, hasn't received any calls asking for an assessment, but says most farmers are switching to other pesticide options for corn.

"We're all against what the government is doing but there won't be too many guys who will putting on neonics anyway," he says. "But now with Lumivia (a DuPont Pioneer alternative), we'll be okay. I don't see a big, big worry, to be honest."

Many crop advisors say they won't do the assessments because it's too time-consuming. It could take four hours spread over a number of days to conduct a pest assessment of 100 acres.

"I'm not doing it," says Bryan Cook of Cropland Consulting, at Prescott. "Farmers basically want to pay you to get to the threshold so they can buy the class 12. The threshold is so bogus and so elusive that I may not get to that threshold. If I do all the

work and don't get the threshold, that doesn't mean that farmers are not at risk, it just means I can't give them (neonic-treated seed)."

New provincial regulations say farmers must get a pest assessment before being allowed to use neonic-treated corn and soybean seeds. The regulations were brought in as a result of a high number of bee deaths over the 2015-16 winter even though studies have been far from conclusive on whether neonics cause bee deaths, argues the Grain Farmers of Ontario, saying the decision was political to appease environmentalists.

Almost all of the corn seeds in Ontario and 60 per cent of soybean seeds are treated with neonics. The GFO says there are at least six other bee stressors.

Maizex director of business management, Steve Denys, says problems getting crop advisors to do assessments was by government design. A certified crop advisor has to be present when the samples are taken, which is a lot of extra work for already-busy crop advisors.

"The regulations were written to make it problematic," says Denys, who farms at Chatham in Western Ontario. "That's why most people are refusing to do it. The government wrote the law in such a way that it (job of getting neonic approval) is not meant to work."

For corn growers, DuPont Pioneer's Lumivia and Syngenta's Fortenza would probably be cheaper than getting fields tested, but aren't as effective as neonics when it comes to controlling aphids and bean leaf beetle, says Denys. There are no other options for soybean growers, but Syngenta and DuPont could have registrations for alternatives in time for the 2018 spring planting, although it is more likely they won't be available until 2019.