

Beekeeper's \$20K class-action suit goes ahead as evidence mounts of neonicotinoids' effects

Lawsuit filed on behalf of all Quebec beekeepers targets insecticide makers Bayer and Syngenta

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Neonicotinoids, also known as neonics, are nicotine-based insecticides commonly used by farmers to help keep everything from field crops to fruit orchards free of pests such as aphids, spider mites and stink bugs. (University of Guelph Honey Bee Research Centre)

A Quebec class-action lawsuit against two producers of neonicotinoids — commonly used insecticides that have been linked to a declining population of honeybees — has been given the go-ahead to proceed to trial after by the Quebec Superior Court.

The Feb. 20 ruling comes as global scientific evidence against the use of neonicotinoids mounts: a study published on Feb. 25 in *Environmental Science and Pollution Research* concluded that the insecticides are, for the most part, useless and ineffective.

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- [Scientists say no doubt neonicotinoid pesticides are killing birds, bees](#)
- [Environmentalists say partial pesticide ban not enough to protect bees](#)

The lawsuit targets Bayer and Syngenta, two international neonicotinoid producers.

Steve Martineau, a Quebec queen bee breeder, launched the suit after seeing more and more of his bees dying or being incapacitated, according to his lawyer Samy Elnemr.

He conducted tests on the bees and found traces of neonicotinoids, his lawyer said.

"We're suing on behalf of Quebec beekeepers whose bees were non-productive or killed," Elnemr said.

Elnemr estimates that Martineau has lost about \$20,000 due to the effects of neonicotinoids on his bee population. That's the amount the firm is seeking in damages through this case.

Growing evidence against neonicotinoids

There is a growing body of evidence linking the pesticides to the declining bee population.

The latest to be published — a [review of 200 studies](#) conducted in Europe — concludes that neonicotinoids have "generally little effect on crop yield," as well as low efficiency, because bugs quickly develop a resistance to the pesticide.





A bee gathers honey from an orange blossom. (Jack Guez/AFP/Getty Images)

Representatives from the David Suzuki Foundation and Equiterre have also long pressed for stricter controls of the pesticide. However, in December, [Health Canada](#) limited but did not ban neonicotinoids, concluding they do not present an unacceptable risk to human health.

Quebec places restrictions on pesticides

On Feb. 19, the provincial government [introduced new restrictions](#) on pesticides considered harmful to honeybees, including neonicotinoids.

Under the changes, farmers will have to get permission from a certified agronomist before using certain pesticides on crops.

- [Quebec places new restrictions on pesticides in bid to protect honeybees](#)

According to Elnemr, the timing of that decision and the authorization of Martineau's lawsuit is coincidental.

"We're not seeking an injunction or anything; it's a straightforward damage case," he said.

In addition to the Quebec class-action suit, Elnemr's firm is proceeding with a Canada-wide lawsuit against neonicotinoid manufacturers.

Elnemr said his firm is now in preparation mode, and the case will likely not be before the courts anytime soon.

"We are confident that once we get to trial that the science will show that these pesticides are harmful to bees and the losses are caused by the product," he said.

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