

Quebec to restrict neonicotinoids and atrazine pesticides

Environment Minister David Heurtel hopes stricter guidelines will encourage use of biopesticides

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Atrazine, one of the pesticides that Quebec plans to restrict, is a common weed control agent that's used mostly on corn crops.

Quebec has announced plans to implement a new strategy that will restrict the use of certain pesticides deemed "high-risk."

Environment Minister David Heurtel's new strategy primarily focuses limiting certain pesticides used in agriculture, such as [neonicotinoids](#) and [atrazine](#), which has been banned in Europe for more than 10 years.

If the guidelines are successfully implemented, farmers will have to get permission from agronomists before using certain pesticides on crops.

Heurtel hopes the new guidelines will discourage the use of riskier pesticides, and increase the use of safer alternatives such as biopesticides.



If Quebec's new guidelines are successfully implemented, farmers will have to get permission from agronomists before using certain "high risk" pesticides on their crops. (Jonathan Carruthers)

But the changes aren't going over well with agricultural workers.

The head of the union of farmers in the Bas-Saint-Laurent region, Gilbert Marquis, is worried the restrictions could hurt their bottom lines.

Marquis is concerned that without pesticides, farmers won't be able to give customers the beautiful-looking veggies they're accustomed to.

"People who buy produce at the grocery store, how far will they travel to find produce that doesn't have blemishes?"

Urban gardeners will face restrictions too

Neonicotinoids in particular have been cited by researchers as a partial cause in the massive decline in bee colony populations in North America in recent years.

The changes will also be felt by urban gardeners who use pesticides on their lawns. The number of pesticides that are banned for use on plants (lawns, trees and shrubs) will triple. There will also be a minimum set distance required for applying pesticides near inhabited areas.

Dr. François Reeves, a cardiologist and member of the David Suzuki Scientists Circle, joined Heurtel for the announcement. She affirmed the link between some pesticides and illnesses such as Parkinson's disease and cancer.

"This will have the benefits of reducing illness caused by pesticides and stopping the decline of the bee, butterfly and earthworm populations," he said.

Environmental group Équiterre said it's happy with the strategy, though it had pushed for an outright ban of certain pesticides rather than restrictions on their use.

Urban beekeeping group Miel Montreal is more skeptical.

Spokesperson Alexandre Beaudoin said he's concerned the government isn't being aggressive enough.

"We'd like to see the name of some of the pesticides and see if it is their objective to ban them or to reduce them by some percentage ... we'd like to see how the agronomists are going to use tools to evaluate whether to use or not use a pesticide," he said.

The Quebec government's next step will be to table a draft bill to amend the Pesticides Act.

Heurtel said he expects the changes could roll out as soon as this spring.