

# How farmers lost the battle over neonics in Ontario

---

By **Michael Robin**

Published: January 2, 2020

News

Reading Time: < 1 minute

---

Despite their value to producers, neonicotinoid pesticides have had a rough ride, driven by conflicting research and public backlash.

Debra Conlon of Grain Farmers of Ontario described how the public narrative that neonics were killing honeybees stymied farmers' best efforts to ameliorate the problem.

It was determined that dust during seeding, exacerbated by an unusually hot March in 2013, was partly to blame.

BASF came up with a dust suppressant, which farmers adopted en masse. It lowered bee mortality by 90 percent.

**Related story:** [Neonic researchers search for path forward](#)

It wasn't enough. Public opinion had been damaged. The message that honeybees were under threat led everyone from General Mills, maker of Cheerios, to various environmental groups to jump on the bandwagon. Conlon describes a meeting she attended at the University of Guelph organized by the David Suzuki Foundation, where the crowd was urged to start a grassroots campaign to ban neonics.

"The fellow that was leading it was a pretty senior guy at Suzuki Foundation and he said the image of the bee ... was the most successful campaign they had ever run, and by that meaning the most profitable campaign that they've ever run."

In the end, neonics were banned in 2015 in Ontario. Conlon said farmers are now paying three times the price of what they used to pay for neonic-treated seed, for an alternative that is less effective.

While the Ontario government is reconsidering its regulations, Health Canada, through its Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA), is proposing a phase out some applications of neonics, such as spraying on fruit trees and municipal parks, while allowing confined spraying in greenhouses and in seed treatments such as canola.

---