

Ontario first in North America to curb bee-killing neonicotinoid pesticides

Written by Joan Russow

Tuesday, 09 June 2015 14:36 - Last Updated Tuesday, 09 June 2015 22:44

By CARLOS OSORIO / TORONTO STAR



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Neonicotinoid pesticides are blamed for hindering the ability of bees and other pollinator species, including birds and butterflies, to navigate, feed, or reproduce. The chemical is also blamed for making pollinators more susceptible to illness.

Farmers and the province have agreed to rules for reduction that begins July 1, while the manufacturer maintains the controversial insecticide is safe.

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By: Robert Benzie Queen's Park Bureau Chief, Published on Tue Jun 09 2015

Ontario is moving to take the sting out of pesticides that are killing bees.

On July 1, the province will become the first jurisdiction in North America to begin reducing the number of acres planted with neonicotinoid-coated corn and soybean seeds.

Agriculture Minister Jeff Leal said by 2017, the new rules should curb the acreage planted with such seeds by 80 per cent.

“Farmers are environmental stewards of their land and this regulation will enable our province’s farmers to strengthen their approach to protecting their crops,” Leal said in a statement Tuesday.

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The pesticide hinders the ability of bees — and 400 other pollinator species like birds and butterflies — to navigate, feed, or reproduce. It's also blamed for making them more susceptible to illness.

In the winter of 2013-14, Ontario beekeepers lost a staggering 58 per cent of the province's honey bees — well above the 15 per cent depletion considered sustainable.

As of July, new rules will be in place to track the sale and use of neonicotinoid-treated seeds.

For next year's planting season, farmers will be allowed to use the seeds on up to 50 per cent of their corn and soybean fields with exceptions being granted only to those who can provide evidence of pest problems.

In 2017, all farmers wanting to use any neonicotinoid-treated seeds will have to prove they have pests.

Environment and Climate Change Minister Glen Murray said the government must take "necessary action to protect these vitally important species and the ecosystems they support from the effects of neurotoxic neonicotinoids."

Ontario Federation of Agriculture president Don McCabe said farmers "worked closely" with the province to ensure the rules work for everyone.

"The OFA supports the need for a complete pollinator policy (and) . . . will continue to work with the government toward the successful implementation of this regulation, keeping the concerns of farmers top of mind as part of a pollinator strategy," said McCabe.

Tibor Szabo, president of the Ontario Beekeepers' Association, said "while the new regs may not be perfect, in the end, the Ontario government did the right thing."

"Our bees continue to die from the overuse of neonicotinoids," said Szabo.

"We hope Ontario farmers will now take it on themselves to go beyond 50 per cent reduction and only use neonicotinoids when there's a real need to control pests."

The phase-out will be a challenge — almost all the corn seed and 60 per cent of soybean seed sold in Ontario is currently treated with the insecticides.

CropLife Canada, a manufacturer of neonicotinoids, has maintained their product is "one of the safest insecticides ever d

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