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Grain Farmers Threaten Bees with Return To Foliar Spraying

Milton, ON. In a letter to members yesterday, the chair of the Grain Farmers of Ontario, reacting to new regulations to limit the use of neonicotinoid seed treatments, indicated that his members will likely resort to foliar sprays that are even more toxic to bees.

The GFO letter addressed members concerns and the “question about whether or not to continue hosting beekeepers under new regulatory environment in Ontario that will mean increased use of foliar sprays.”

According to Health Canada, neonicotinoid pesticides on corn and soy seeds have been responsible for bee kills in Ontario, Quebec and Manitoba. The Ontario regulations aim to limit the use of neonicotinoid treated seeds by allowing their use only when the need for pest protection can be demonstrated. According to OMAFRA crop specialists only 20% of acreage actually needs these seed treatments yet they are currently being used on nearly 100% of corn planted in Ontario. Both the EPA and PMRA have indicated that a moratorium on the use of neonicotinoids on corn yields would be minimal and almost nil for soy. It is not clear from the GFO letter why foliar sprays would be necessary or what foliar sprays are being contemplated as a replacement for neonicotinoids.

Included in the GFO mailing was the opinion of their legal counsel that, “The new Pesticide Act Regulations will leave most grain farmers with no alternative but to return to traditional spraying for pest control/crop protection.” This opinion also warned ...”such applications may be more harmful to bees than the seed-based treatment that has been banned. Further, it is important that this risk (foliar sprays) be communicated to and understood and accepted by beekeepers before they are allowed to place their hives on a grain farmer’s property.”

“Ontario’s regulations offer relief for honey bees, wild bees and beekeepers who continue to suffer unacceptable losses,” said OBA president Tibor Szabo. “It’s hard to understand why anyone would continue to kill bees unnecessarily with foliar pesticides.”

The Ontario Beekeepers’ Association represents Ontario’s 3,100 beekeepers. In 2013, after two years of widespread bee kills in Ontario, Quebec and Manitoba, Health Canada declared, “the current agricultural use of neonicotinoid seed treatments on corn and soy is unsustainable.” Ontario beekeepers have experienced 58% colony loss in the winter of 2013-2014 and an estimated 35% colony losses for the past winter, more than twice the sustainable level of losses. The OBA fully supports the Government of Ontario’s goal of reducing the use of neonicotinoid seed treatments on corn and soy by 80% by 2017.

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