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Ontario and Quebec Beekeepers Urge Caution After Mass Bee Kill

On June 5th, 2020 two Quebec beekeepers experienced a mass killing of their bees associated with the application of herbicides. 600+ hives were being prepared for travel to blueberry pollination sites when more than 50% of the colonies were destroyed. At the time of the kills herbicides were being sprayed on a nearby field in windy conditions. The beekeepers affected were present at the time of the incident, were able to speak to the farmer and obtain the labels for the chemicals being sprayed - a mix of Vios G3 (Bayer) + Roundup (Glyphosate) + Engenia (BASF) with the active ingredient Dicamba.

“It literally rained bees and bumble bees” reported Quebec Beekeeper Joel Laberge.

In 2012, systemic neonicotinoid pesticides applied as corn and soy seed treatments were found to be responsible for acute and chronic bee mortality. Both Quebec and Ontario have taken steps to avoid the overuse of this pesticide. Until now, herbicides have not been implicated in bee kills in Ontario or Quebec.

Beekeepers urge PMRA and the provinces to immediately review the use of herbicide and herbicide mixes. While each of the herbicide chemicals may have been registered by PMRA individually, the mixture of these chemicals has not been confirmed to be safe for bees. In fact, the sale of Dicamba, the active ingredient in Engenia has been partially banned in the U.S. and the synergistic toxic effects on insect pollinators when mixing these chemicals is unknown. Quebec and Ontario beekeepers urge government to issue a caution to farmers and to immediately initiate research on the effect of acute and chronic exposure to combinations of these chemicals.

To avoid more mass bee kills, Quebec and Ontario beekeepers ask farmers to follow and observe the cautions on the labels to avoid drift and not spray in hot and windy conditions. Farmers are asked to spray in the early morning and late evening to avoid spraying during the day when bees are active.

Beekeepers in both Quebec and Ontario produce honey and provide bees to pollinate our fresh fruit and vegetables. Honey production has been limited by the increase in cash crops of corn and soy and the use of herbicides that has reduced the amount of quality forage. Beekeepers cannot sustain heavy losses of colonies.

“Beekeepers need farmers’ support” said Julie Fontaine, president of the AADQ Pesticides Committee. Good relations between beekeepers and farmers are essential if we are to sustain our beekeeping industry and enjoy a healthy population of honey bees, wild bees and bumble bees.”

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