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Press Release

Saskatchewan Environmental Society

Thursday, July 2, 2015

For immediate release

SES urges Saskatchewan government to follow Ontario's lead and strictly regulate use of toxic neonics

The Saskatchewan Environmental Society (SES) President Bert Weichel called on the Saskatchewan government today to follow the lead of the Ontario government and launch a regulatory process aimed at significantly reducing the use of neonicotinoids (neonics), a widely used group of insecticides. Weichel said that reduced use of neonics is essential in order to protect Saskatchewan's ecosystems, including bees, wild pollinators, and bird populations.

"Based on the research coming out of other jurisdictions and based on the levels of neonics found in surface waters in Saskatchewan, SES has concluded that neonics pose a major risk in Saskatchewan," said Weichel. "There is growing evidence from around the world that the negative impacts of neonics can cascade through ecosystems, weakening their stability and important soil and freshwater functions can be disrupted, including litter break down, nutrient cycling, and biological pest control."

Neonics are the world's most widely used insecticides. Over 40% of Canadian prairie cropland is treated with neonics each year. In Saskatchewan seeds of canola, wheat, barley, oats, and field pea crops are regularly treated.

Ontario's rules took effect July 1 and neonics will be gradually phased out by at least 80% over two years. Ontario's regulations focus on the two crops in that province where neonics are most heavily used: corn and soybeans.

Neonic seed sellers in Ontario will need to obtain a special license, submit annual sales reports to the government, and ensure that farmers meet the requirements for using treated seeds. Vendors will also need to ensure they make untreated seeds available for purchase, thus assuring that farmers have options that are free of neonics. By 2017, farmers in Ontario will not be able to use treated seeds unless they complete a course in integrated pest management, sign a written declaration that integrated pest management principles have been considered, and complete a pest assessment report on their property.

Weichel emphasized that neonics are nerve poisons. They are also systemic pesticides, so the chemical being applied migrates to all parts



of plants as they grow, including spreading to the nectar and pollen of flowering plants.

“There is evidence that bees cannot taste these insecticides, leaving them highly vulnerable,” said Weichel. “Bumble bees exposed to neonics experience a significant decline in their body mass and there is a reduction in colony growth. Meanwhile, Dutch research has documented a worrisome drop in bird populations near aquatic areas with neonic concentrations as low as 20 parts per billion.”

SES Board member Murray Hidlebaugh emphasized the need for Saskatchewan government intervention to ensure farmers have the right to access seed that is free from neonic treatment.

“We have a particular problem with respect to neonic use on canola in Saskatchewan. We have reached the point now where 98% of canola seed is treated. There is no sound rationale for putting neonics on all seeds,” said Hidlebaugh. “The Saskatchewan government must take steps to guarantee Saskatchewan farmers the right to purchase canola seed that is neonic-free.”

Hidlebaugh also urged the Government of Canada to upgrade its testing procedures when new pesticides are being introduced. He said, “The ecological impact of neonics was underestimated in the original testing. The results do not serve Canadians well.”

Saskatchewan Environmental Society

The Saskatchewan Environmental Society (SES) is a non-profit, registered charity whose mandate is to work towards a world in which all needs be met in sustainable ways. SES has been active in Saskatchewan since 1970. We work on issues such as sustainable energy and climate solutions, water protection, resource conservation and management, biodiversity preservation, reduction of toxic substances, and sustainability planning.

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