

North Dakota Beekeeper on SB 2134 Pat Backer of Center, ND (Backer Bees)

Backer Bees was established 20 years ago and is located in Center, North Dakota. North Dakota is the #1 honey producing state and the economic repercussions of SB 2134 would be devastating to North Dakota and the trickle impact is tremendous.

Established Operation and Devaluation:

We have developed a 2-acre plot of land (stockpile area) that we have invested over \$100,000 in adding a building, terrain work and gravel. This piece of land is extremely valuable to a bee business as a place to set the semi loads of hives as they arrive from warmer states in May/June and sit as we spend 7-10 evenings (pending weather, trucking schedules, equipment breakdowns and help) transporting them to their land spots for the season. We also use this spot to set 48-96 hives during the 3 month season. This piece of land is distinctly valuable in the beekeeping trade and would become significantly worthless, monetary and use-wise, with distance restrictions.

If a distance limit of hive locations is imposed, we would lose the use of this \$100k piece of property as well as our \$900k business acreage in which our operative equipment is located and hives are placed. Both would decrease dramatically in value to sell as a bee operation again, telling us what we can and cannot do with our property and dictate commerce.

Trucking:

Again in Sept/October, this simple 2-acres, that is lined by a paved highway, is valuable as we attempt to wrangle to secure truck drivers, since they are in such demand this time of year, to transport our hives to the West. Drivers are difficult to obtain and if a keeper has shotty terrain locations to load at, it is extremely difficult and expensive. Most are not fond of navigating rough pastures at night and it is definitely not a desire of landowners to have these semi-trucks on their land for 1/4 a mile.

Questions:

How about the weather that controls the agriculture world? There are times, with rain and snow, that taking our required equipment to the hives, becomes difficult and if we can't get to those hives in a timely manner, we lose stock. In addition, our landowners are not going to allow the tearing up of personal property and this poses and additional risk. When we have a road close for access, this makes our farming and hives more consistent and therefore more valuable to the entire Bee Industry.

Since a bee's flight direction is driven by vegetation and water, do we go as far to ask the farmers to NOT plant canola, sunflowers, alfalfa, buckwheat, and beans within 1/4 mile from the road? How about the natural clover, alfalfa, and wild flowers that grow in the ditches of these roads? Then there are ponds, lakes, sloughs, puddles, creeks, and stock tanks. Should these be dictated to be a specified distance from the roads?

Three Months:

The harvest producing time span that hives are in North Dakota is rather short: later May/June to October. The abundant months are July, August and September. The hives then shrink in October and at that time, are transported to warmer states. So, for 3 months the bees are doing their job on the abundant crops, vegetation and extended hours of daylight and therefore, making North Dakota the number one Honey Producing State. This status comes from basically 3 magical months that the perfection of North Dakota offers.

Shortage of Bees Nationwide:

There are a shortage of bees in the times of 2023. A beekeepers livelihood is based on the strength and numbers of hives therefore, we are not going to purposely damage the chance of survival of our hives. We know the ins and outs of the survival and thriving of a bee colony. Demanding that hives be placed 1/4 mile form a road, is a way to shrink, restrict, control, and deter beekeeping farming.

Logical:

Placing hives a certain distance from a road would sound "logical" to the basic ears yet ask a beekeeper that has invested years of experience, relationships, and knowledge to their trade. We do understand the "logic" and it is our hope that you hear our reasoning. Invite a beekeeper to your table and chat about the habits and health of a bee hive and you will definitely be amazed.

So, for 3 strong months of the year, annoyed people are willing to crash the farming trade of beekeeping in North Dakota? That may sound dramatic yet when a regulation such as location placement, which is, in reality, an agreement with private/corporate landowners, is dictated, careers and livelihood's lost. It is the way we make a living at the same time contributing to nature's routines. Beekeeping homesteads, processing plants, storage, hives, and production facilities are within 1/4 mile from roads. This regulation would strip our occupation, way of life and devalue our trade.

Nature Drives Bee Habits:

Bees are creatures driven by nature—eat and reproduce. If the vegetation is there, they take the shortest path. North Dakota is a top producer of honey because of the vegetation, daylight hours, lack of spray, and landowner appreciation of bees. The economic impact would be severe.

Approximately 38.6 million pounds of honey is produced in North Dakota a year and that amount does not support the need that US demands which is 450 million pounds. The

needed honey has to be imported. There are 340 registered beekeepers in North Dakota and they employ, spend and produce. The social impact would be severe.

Landowners:

Landowners mostly direct where they would prefer the hives be placed on their land and this must be respected since we are guests. Normally, they too, would like us to place the hives closer to the entrance end of their land plots to reduce vegetation/terrain disruptions and easy access for us. We are a somewhat small beekeeping operation with a range of 1,200-2,000 hives and have over 65 landowners that we have spent 20 years creating relationships with. This Bill would reduce our registered bee placement areas by 65%.

These landowners are so valuable to bee farming and reducing or restricting the area ranges in which hives can be placed, is an enormous burden and infringes on landowner rights. We have committed years of time, conversations and respect for our landowners and to secure spots for our hives. Many depend on our bees to boost their yields. For instance, we have a landowner that has reported his canola and sunflower yields are up 10% when the bees are placed on his property. The knowledge and relationships that we have developed with the landowners is unmeasurable and to put yet another land owner restriction on them, just isn't right.

Reduced areas:

The complaints about too many hives in North Dakota are already an issue and with a restriction as to distance placement, it only reduces the area in which they can be located which brews up yet another issue. If you take a section of land and ask us to place the hives a 1/4 a mile from the road, you have now reduced our available land area by one mile in just that section.

The Fix?:

Is there a quick "fix" for the frustration and annoyance of bees splatting windshield, bikers or car grills? I guess one could ask the same about mosquitos. They are in North Dakota approximately about the same time frame yet they do not pollinate crops, support trades and families and supply a highly sought after commodity. Bees produce honey, wax, pollen, and propolis which are commodities that support the markets and a significant number of North Dakota families (Owners, workers) and provide economic stimulants to the state.

More restrictions are not the answer for an annoyance or frustration.