

2010 Third Place Winner (tied)

Is My Community Honey Bee Friendly? By Anna Barlow, 14, Milford, New Hampshire

I had never really thought about it before.

Once I did, I started researching the topic. And I've learned a lot.

Milford is not exactly a farming community anymore. It's in southern New Hampshire, which has seen a lot of growth in the past 20 years. Milford is 25.4 square miles and slightly more than 15,000 people live here. [1] I live in an older neighborhood, which is why we don't keep the beehives at my house.

My 4-H Club's three beehives are at Zahn's Pick-Your Own Blueberry Farm in Milford, which is a few minutes drive from my home. We chose to put the bees at Zahn's because they'd be next to a field of blueberries and near a small pond, a hayfield and lots of goldenrod. The Zahns don't use pesticides, which influenced our decision to put the bees there.

But our bees have a mind of their own. We don't see them at the blueberries very often. They fly out of the hive and disappear over the horizon. No one knows except them where they are headed. They're going out into the community.

Are there laws that prohibit beekeeping in my community?

There are no laws that prohibit beekeeping in Milford or in New Hampshire. There are, however, some laws and regulations around bringing bees into New Hampshire, [2] and about inspection of hives when there is colony collapse or an infestation of the hive by mites or some other disease. [3]

I did find a NH regulation about hive inspections that says, "No honey, cappings, apiary equipment or appliances shall be exposed to flying bees so as to become a source of nuisance or contamination." [4] I suppose that could be used to require a hive to be removed if someone thought it was a nuisance.

I found laws and regulations that benefit beekeeping somewhat. There is a law about spraying fruit trees, shade trees or shrubs when they're in blossom. [5] I believe this is to protect the bees that work in New Hampshire's apple orchards.

Does our community encourage roadside wildflowers?

I called Mary Dickson, at the Milford Public Works Office, and she told me that Milford does mow the roadsides. However, on the Roadside Development page of the NH Dept. of Transportation website, they state as a goal:

"Promote extensive plantings of lilacs and wildflowers throughout the state, for the pleasure and use of residents and visitors. They involve agricultural, educational and horticultural programs in planting and propagating lilacs and wildflowers for local community projects." [6]

It was very encouraging for me to read this. And at the bottom of the web page, there was mention of a flower program along highways project.

Pesticide use in my community

When I see our bees flying away from hives and over the tree line, I know that on the other side of the trees are suburban houses with enormous grass lawns. You can tell that some of them use lawn chemicals. The ChemLawn truck is a familiar sight in

Milford. In the summer I see ChemLawn trucks trundling up and down the street where I live.

The ChemLawn website has a product use statement page, but doesn't list the chemicals they use. What they do say is: "We ensure these products are applied safely according to federal, state and local regulations. The specific products applied to your landscape are detailed on your invoice with each treatment. [7]

On the Toxics Action Center website they have a report called Be Truly Green-Refuse to Use ChemLawn. In the executive summary the report says that: "The rate of pesticides used on lawns is on average ten times more per acre than what is used on agricultural lands" and "All 32 of TruGreen ChemLawn's pesticide products include ingredients that pose threats to the environment including water supplies, aquatic organisms, and non-targeted insects." [8]

The same goes for people.

Alden Marshall is a leader in the NH beekeeping community. Our 4-H club met him at the Merrimack Valley Beekeeper's bee school last year. He was one of the instructors and we bought our packaged bees from him last May.

When I talked to Mr. Marshall, owner of B-Line Apiary in Hudson, he said, "Yes, Lawn chemicals and those applied to ornamentals, vegetables and fruit trees are harmful to bees. In actuality most all pesticides are harmful with perhaps the exception of the bacillus types. I am sure the list would be quite extensive if printed here. That's why the use labels are so important in applications."

I emailed David J. Rousseau, the Director of the NH Division of Pesticide Control, asking him about insecticides, that being one of my main concerns. His response about spraying was:

"There is consideration for certain honey bee hive locations when insecticides are used in coordination with a "special permit." Special permits are required for certain types of pesticide application proposals, typically those applications proposed for use in "sensitive" areas such as water or when applied aerially, such as by airplane or helicopter."

When I asked him what insecticides were in common uses in New Hampshire, he did not give me a straight answer, which leads me to believe that, yes, they are harmful to bees and other organisms.

How could Milford be more bee-friendly?

Mr. Marshall's suggestions for making Milford more bee-friendly, was "to plant vegetation that is attractive to bees which would improve the nutrition of colonies. These could be domestic or wildflower plants along hedge rows and road sides."

Mr. Rousseau's suggestions were to encourage beekeeping and being very careful when considering using pesticides, and always following the label.

I started out writing this essay not knowing much about the local laws, regulations, requirements and feelings about beekeeping, pesticides, flowers, and lawn care. Now that I do, I am ready to spread the news to the 4-H club, make a to-do list about helping bees in Milford, and write a letter to the local selectman about roadside plant growth.

Endnotes:

1. Milford New Hampshire Profile. Economic & Labor Market Information Bureau, NH Employment Security, 14 Nov. 2008. Web. 2 Feb. 2010. <<http://www.nh.gov/nhes/elmi/htmlprofiles/milford.html>>.
2. New Hampshire Administrative Rules. Agr1803.01 Moving Bees into New Hampshire
3. New Hampshire administrative Rules. Agr1803.02 (a)(1) Exposed Equipment
4. New Hampshire RSA Title XL Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Husbandry, Chp. 429:3 Right of Entry; Authority of Inspector
5. New Hampshire RSA Title XL Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Husbandry, Chp. 429:9 Spraying Trees; When Prohibited
6. "The Governor's Lilac and Wildflower Commission." Web.
7. "TruGreen ChemLawn Product Use Statement." Web.
8. Refuse to Use ChemLawn, Toxics Action Center, Boston, MA, 2005.

Resources:

People I talked with or emailed with for this essay:

Alden Marshall, Merrimack Valley Beekeepers and owner, B-Line Apiary, Hudson

Dawn Griska, Milford Town Administrator

Mary Dickson, Milford Department of Public Works

David J. Rousseau, the Director of the NH Division of Pesticide Control

Website I consulted:

Merrimack Valley Beekeepers, <<http://www.mybee.org>>

New Hampshire Department of Transportation Roadside Development, <<http://www.nh.gov/dot/org/projectdevelopment/highwaydesign/units/roadsidedevelopment/index.htm>>

Refuse to Use ChemLawn-Be Truly Green, <<http://www.refusetousechemlawn.org/home>>

State of New Hampshire Office of Legislative Services Administrative Rules, <http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/rules/about_rules/listagencies.htm>

State of New Hampshire Revised Statutes Online, <<http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/RSA/html/indexes/default.html>>

Town of Milford, <<http://milfordnh.info/milford/index.htm>>

TruGreen ChemLawn website, <<http://www.trugreen.com>>