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PRESS RELEASE

Ontario's political parties express positions on bee health

Milton, ON, May 28, 2014. The Ontario Beekeepers' Association has surveyed each of the four major parties running in this year's provincial election for their plan to solve Ontario's current bee health crisis.

In 2012 and 2013, over 14,000 hives were lost to bee kills linked to the indiscriminate use of neonicotinoid pesticides by Health Canada. Last year, nearly 99% of the 2.2 million acres of corn in Ontario were treated with neonicotinoids, even though the Ontario Ministry of Food and Agriculture crop specialists indicate that only 10% to 20% of acreage needs pest protection.

The OBA has released a revised position on neonicotinoids and bee health. The new position calls for a moratorium on the sale of neonicotinoid treated seeds but offers the option for farmers to apply for one-time use if they can demonstrate, through an approved soil test or monitoring program, a problem that requires neonicotinoid-treated seeds. This position is consistent with that adopted by the National Farmers Union.

Two questions were asked via email to the leaders of the Ontario PC, Ontario Liberal, Ontario NDP and Green Party of Ontario:

- 1) Ontario's beekeeping industry has suffered through the loss of thousands of hives in both 2012 and 2013 that Health Canada has confirmed were the result of exposure to neonicotinoid pesticides in soy and corn planting. Should you be elected to lead the Government of Ontario, would you support the Ontario Beekeepers' Association's call for an immediate moratorium on the sale of the neonicotinoid treated seeds that are killing our bees?*
- 2) Ontario is suffering a serious decline in the population of the insect pollinators we rely on for our locally grown foods as the result of the indiscriminate use of neonicotinoid pesticides. Health Canada and other studies have shown significant amounts of persistent neonicotinoid pesticides in water and soil samples across Ontario. If elected, will your party declare this an urgent environmental problem?*

As of this writing the OBA has received responses from three parties. Following are excerpts of their position. The complete responses can be found at ontariobee.com/neonics.

From Kathleen Wynne, leader of the Ontario Liberal Party:

- 1) "The Ontario Liberals are committed to working with the agricultural and beekeeping sectors to (1) ensure full and equitable access to non-neonicotinoid treated seed for growers, and (2) establish a system that allows for targeted use of neonicotinoids only in production areas or production circumstances where these pesticides are actually shown to be required."
- 2) "The OBA proposal to hold a targeted forum to develop recommendations and identify a pollinator health roadmap is one that a Liberal government would identify as a priority

action to be undertaken within the first six weeks of being elected.”

From Mike Schreiner, leader of the Green Party of Ontario:

- 1) “The Green Party of Ontario proposes a ban on neonicotinoid pesticides until scientific evidence can conclusively determine that there is another cause for bee kills. The Green Party believes the precautionary principle should be applied to threats to our food system.”
- 2) “We firmly believe that the provincial and federal governments should not put our food supply and our local economy at risk by failing to protect insect pollinators.”

From Tim Hudak, leader of the Progressive Conservative party of Ontario:

“We appreciate the opportunity to listen to your priorities for Ontario. We share your commitment to Ontario’s future and believe that with more and better jobs, we can do what’s necessary to bring about the change Ontario needs.”

The OBA has yet to hear from the NDP Ontario Party.

“We are heartened by the response from Liberal leader Kathleen Wynne. She understands the issue and is committed to a science-based solution that balances the needs of farmers with the survival of bees and native pollinators. If implemented, this approach could reduce the amount of neonicotinoid treated seed by 80% or more.” said OBA president Dan Davidson. “We are also grateful to the Green Party for their continued commitment to this issue.”

The NFU in Ontario has adopted a similar position to the OBA on neonicotinoids and bee health. Both organizations have been working together on a solution that benefits bees and beekeepers while maintaining the economic viability of farming.

“The NFU is pleased that the Liberal Party of Ontario is prepared to make untreated seed the default option and would only allow the targeted use of treated seed in limited circumstances, and that the Ontario Green Party supports a moratorium. As farmers, we will work with the OBA to ensure the next Ontario government takes concrete action to protect Ontario's native pollinators, bees and beekeepers,” said Karen Eatwell, Ontario President, National Farmers Union.

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