

## Questionnaire: Ontario Beekeepers' Association (OBA)

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 (ban) on the sale of the neonicotinoid treated seeds that are killing our bees?***

I had the pleasure to meet with the OBA executive in late March and was impressed with the commendable amount of research undertaken by the association and its members on the impacts of neonicotinoid-treated seed on bee health. Pollinator health is a significant issue for the agricultural sector and for the ongoing environmental and economic strength of the province.

There are approximately 3,000 registered beekeepers with approximately 100,000 honey bee colonies in Ontario. Honey production is a \$25 million industry and pollination services is an approximately \$1.5 million industry, with an estimated value of \$170 million to Ontario agriculture. Ontario Liberals understand the significant value of the beekeeping industry to this province.

The other important part of the equation are the growers — over 28,000 grain farmers producing over \$3 billion of corn and soybeans on 1.8 million hectares (4.5 million acres). These farmers are concerned about being able to effectively and efficiently control pests that damage corn and soybean crops and potentially reduce yield.

As the Minister of Agriculture and Food, I have had to weigh these competing interests. I remain concerned about the destabilizing impacts of an outright moratorium or ban on the use of neonicotinoid-treated seeds. However, I am equally concerned about the indiscriminate and blanket use of neonicotinoid-treated seed and the implications for the environment and pollinator health.

Therefore, 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.

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The proposed approach would be science-based and consistent with the extensive research the Wynne government has helped fund regarding the utility of neonicotinoid-treated seeds in Ontario. The Wynne government believes that by moving away from the application of neonicotinoid-treated seed as the default for planting in Ontario, and instead promote targeted use, we will be able to build common ground between the interests of grain growers and beekeepers in the province.

It is vital that beekeepers have the wherewithal to continue their operations after experiencing incidences of high bee mortality. For this reason, the Wynne government established a beekeeper support program this spring to compensate beekeepers for any disaster-level losses experienced over the year.

In addition to these ongoing activities, we will implement an insurance program to help provincial beekeepers recover acute bee losses. A Wynne government would continue to work closely with the OBA in developing solutions that promote ongoing, long-term pollinator health in the province.

Through this work, we will implement an insurance program to help provincial beekeepers recover acute bee losses that may occur this spring.

2. Ontario is suffering a serious decline in the population of the insect pollinators we rely on for our locally grown foods as a result of the indiscriminate use of neonicotinoid pesticides on field crops. 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?***

The Wynne government shares the OBA's concern regarding the potential environmental impacts associated with neonicotinoid use.

That is why the Wynne government has provided \$1.2 million to support research initiatives on bee health. Going forward, we are committed to working with the OBA and other impacted stakeholders in the development of a broader Pollinator Health Work Plan. 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.



As we look for solutions that are specific to Ontario, it is also necessary that we ensure that the federal government continues to show leadership on this issue. That is why as Minister of Agriculture and Food, I wrote to Federal Health Minister Aglukkaq and Federal Agriculture Minister Ritz last year to express my concerns regarding the impact of neonicotinoids on pollinators and to urge that the federal Pest Management Regulatory Agency expedite their studies on the issue so that answers could be made available earlier than the current target date of 2018. It will also be important to monitor the activities of the federal government's National Bee Health Committee established in and ensure that Ontario's perspectives are well represented in those discussions.

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