

MEDIA RELEASE



ONTARIO BEEKEEPERS STILL SUFFERING UNSUSTAINABLE COLONY LOSSES

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More than half (51%) of Ontario beekeepers responding to a poll by the Ontario Beekeepers' Association experienced unsustainable overwinter losses in the 2016/2017 winter and spring. More than 30% of beekeepers reported losses exceeding 50% of their colonies. Typically, beekeepers can sustain overwinter colony losses of 15% to 20% without undue economic stress.

"These numbers tell us that while bee health may be improving, we are still a long way from returning to a situation where pollinator health in Ontario is at an acceptable level," says OBA president, Jim Coneybeare.

When asked for reasons for overwinter losses, 29% of beekeepers cited small or weak hives in the fall as the main reason for winter losses, followed by 24% citing problems with queens, 17% saying mite overload and 16% feeling pesticide issues were to blame for overwinter losses. Starvation or lack of adequate stores was cited by 14% of respondents as the reason for overwinter losses.

For those beekeepers who considered mite overload as the reason for overwinter losses, most had treated for mites in the fall using approved methods but only 18% had measured mite loads in the fall.

"Measuring mite loads is an important beekeeping practice," says Coneybeare. "We still have work to do to educate beekeepers as to the importance of staying on top of mite loads."

Those beekeepers who cited pesticide issues as the cause of winter losses, most (74%) suspected problems from corn or soy plantings nearby.

Typically, overwinter losses only describe the condition of colonies when they are unpacked in early spring. Many beekeepers suffer additional losses or 'spring dwindling' if colonies do not quickly repopulate in early spring. Over 47% of beekeepers reported problems with queens this spring. A small number (12%) reported pesticide exposure issues as the cause of spring dwindling.

Not surprisingly, Ontario beekeepers seem to agree on issues holding back their bees this spring. They mentioned too much rain, weak nectar flow, queen problems (drone layers, poor weather for mating flights) and excessive swarming as issues of common concern.

When asked whether their bees looked better or worse this year compared to last, 45% said about the same with somewhat more feeling their bees were doing better (34%) than worse (21%).

Six hundred beekeepers responded to the OBA poll, up 38% from last year's poll. While 45 respondents identified as commercial beekeepers, most respondents were small beekeepers with fewer than 50 colonies. Geographically, beekeepers from all over the province were represented in the poll, with 28% from Eastern Ontario, 20% from Southwestern Ontario, 13% from Central Ontario, and 11% coming from Huron / Perth / Grey / Bruce / Wellington.

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