



MEDIA RELEASE: March 9, 2014

Ontario beekeepers respond to Grain Farmers Pollinator Health Blueprint

Milton, ON. Today the Grain Farmers of Ontario (GFO) released its Pollinator Health Blueprint in which they suggest a number of opportunities to “enhance pollinator and managed bee health.”

“Their proposal relies too heavily on voluntary compliance. It’s an unacceptably high-risk approach to pollinator protection,” said OBA President, Tibor Szabo. “There is nothing in this plan that promotes the targeted use of pesticides to replace the current system of using pesticides prophylactically on nearly 100% of all the corn planted in Ontario.”

The acute decline in population of bees in Ontario is tied to the widespread use of neonicotinoids on close to five million acres of corn, soy and winter wheat. Claims for bee kills in Ontario due to the application of neonicotinoids have been confirmed by Health Canada for both 2012 and 2013 with reported incidents increasing in 2014. In the spring of 2014, Ontario reported 58% overwinter losses, over three times the average of all other Canadian provinces.

The OBA and the Canadian Honey Council (CHC) support the Ontario government’s proposed regulations to reduce the acreage of treated seeds by 80% by 2017. This target recognizes the need to stop the overuse of this toxic pesticide on acreage where there is no benefit to the farmer but is causing the decline in bee population. The OBA believes that this is a reasonable proposal that permits farmers to access neonicotinoids when they demonstrate the need for it.

“OBA recognizes that some of GFO’s suggestions could be positive supplements to Ontario’s plan. However, the emphasis on tracking pesticide drift ignores the problem with persistent, systemic pesticides that get into our soil and water and expose bees to poison from dust, pollen and standing water,” says Szabo.

The GFO has a large, well-funded constituency. It is not surprising that when comparing the Pollinator Health Blueprint to Ontario’s Pesticide Reduction Policy, GFO points to the key economic benefit of their blueprint as “minimal anticipated impacts on (crop) yields and minimal costs for the grain industry and the end user”.

According to the GFO, these recommendations were created by a “Pollinator Task Force” put together by GFO and inclusive of representatives of the seed and agchem industry and just two beekeepers. It is important to note that the Ontario Beekeepers’ Association, the organization that has represented Ontario beekeepers since 1881, was not consulted on this plan even after inviting the GFO to meet and discuss solutions with them. “We continue to wait for the GFO to accept our invitation,” adds Szabo.

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