



January 24, 2020

Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs
Pre-Budget Consultations
Legislative Assembly of Ontario
99 Wellesley Street West, Room B-304
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1A2

Subject: Ontario Beekeepers Submission to the Committee

Dear Committee Members,

Since 1881, the Ontario Beekeepers' Association has represented the interests of Ontario beekeepers. Today and due to new interest in beekeeping there are more than 3,100 beekeepers in Ontario and last year's 1,400 OBA membership represents a record number.

As you know, Ontario's beekeepers supply farmers with the honey bee colonies they need to pollinate a wide range of crops, including apples, apricots, asparagus, blueberries, squash and canola. In 2018 Ontario's 100,400 colonies produced 3,741 tons of honey with a value of \$34 million. At the same time, pollination by Ontario's honey bees generates about \$897 million in sales for crops grown in the province each year.

The OBA is a membership-based not-for-profit organization that operates without access to market-based support payments. With very limited funding we deliver a truly amazing amount of benefits to Ontario beekeepers. Here's a partial list:

- Two learning-rich educational conferences each year
- Best management practices workshops and materials to improve the skills of beginner and advanced beekeepers
- An online course for new beekeepers
- Applied research on new techniques and tools to improve bee health and productivity
- A variety of educational- based communications vehicles, including social media, newsletters, and the ***Ontario Bee Journal***, which is published six times a year and was voted one of the world's best bee journals at **Apimondia**, last year's international conference in Montreal
- A Facebook page with over 4500 followers

- Mentoring and supporting Ontario queen breeders who produce unique Ontario hygienic and disease-resistant queens that are sold to beekeepers in Ontario and across Canada
- Helping in the formation and ongoing support for the Commercial Beekeeping course at Niagara College designed to nurture the next generation of beekeepers
- Supporting the production of value-added products, such as Mead, via a new association of mead makers
- Promoting 100% Ontario Honey (with help from Foodland Ontario) and providing members with marketing materials to support honey sales at farm gate and farmer's markets
- Participating in research projects with the universities of York and Guelph designed to further our understanding of the dynamics of bee health
- Participating in and providing inputs to a variety of discussions with stakeholders including farm and environmental groups promoting pollinator health
- Offering expert advice on policies and programs effecting beekeepers or bee health
- Striking stakeholder working groups to deal with issues as they arise, such as the Small Hive Beetle Working Group
- Liaison with Quebec beekeepers and with the Canadian Honey Council on issues of importance to Ontario beekeepers.

Today, Ontario beekeepers face unprecedented challenges.

Loss of forage and declining honey production: Due to the expansion of corn and soy cropping, much of the historic hay and marginal land that provided nectar sources and nutritional forage has been lost. Unusual weather patterns have also contributed to a decline in honey production.

Chronic and widespread exposure to highly toxic, systemic, water soluble pesticides: Seed treatments are still being overused at an alarming rate. OMAFRA agronomists suggest 15 - 30% of crops may benefit from treated seed while closer to 100% of corn, 60% of soy and 50% of winter wheat are currently using treated seed. Studies confirm the observation of experienced beekeepers that pesticides are a significant factor on low honey yields and failing colonies. Overwinter mortality rates continue at unsustainable levels. Other negating influences include colonies that crash in the fall, fewer bees per colony, and premature queen failures requiring costly queen replacements are symptomatic of pesticide exposure.

Mites and diseases compound pesticide negative effects on colony health. Mites and other bee diseases create problems for beekeepers with colonies already weakened from pesticide exposure.

Climate change is causing unusual weather patterns and spiking seasonal temperatures. Each year the unique cycles of wet and dry seasons and weather events present new challenges. New invasive

species, such as Small Hive Beetle have arrived from the U.S. and are establishing themselves in Ontario.

Global trade is resulting in more adulterated and/or cheaper honey on shelves in Ontario and Quebec. Ontario beekeepers find their business with large retail chains is frequently being undercut by dumped honey products from South America or Asia. Changes in labelling laws have been delayed. Imported honey products continue to show a Canada No.1 label.

For many years, the government of Ontario has helped Ontario Beekeepers address bee health issues and grow their business. OMAFRA's provincial apiculturist and its best-in-class bee inspection program has been a vital and invaluable partner. Foodland Ontario's honey features have been of great value to a small industry that cannot afford to advertise. Since September 2019, a new federal and provincial government program has committed more than \$221,000 to support 135 projects for individual beekeepers. And annually Ontario has provided transfer payments which allow the OBA to deliver beekeeper education programs through its world-class Technology-Transfer Program.

This is indeed welcome support but there is more the government of Ontario must do if we are to sustain our beekeeping industry and our ability to manage healthy hives needed for honey production and pollination.

The former 3-year transfer payment (TPA) to the OBA has been replaced with an annual project-based grant under the Grass Roots Program. We need better consultation with OMAFRA on program design so that support, such as the Grass Roots Program better fits the needs of the beekeeping community and Ontario's agricultural industry:

- On-site and online education and training to upgrade the skills of beekeepers at all levels
- Support for the breeding, production and marketing of Ontario-bred disease resistant queens
- Support for market development of value added products, such as mead and beeswax-based cosmetics
- Support for local beekeeping associations, as extensions of OBA-based training and education
- Applied research to develop new tools, equipment and treatments.

Pesticide exposure from the overuse of pesticides continues to be a serious problem for beekeepers in in Ontario where 60% or more of Canada's corn and soy is grown. The widespread application of persistent water-soluble seed treatments has declined only 25%, despite Class 12 legislation. New pesticides introduced to replace neonicotinoids continue to be problematic for honey bee, bumble bee and wild pollinator health, as well as other species habitat such as aquatic invertebrates.

In spite of this pervasive threat from seed treatments, the Government of Ontario proposes eliminating tracking of pesticide sales and applications. Farmers still do not have clear price signals

when purchasing seeds in order to make business decisions on application costs and yields based on a risk-benefit approach. To our mind, only pesticide manufacturers profit from the current situation.

The Pollinator Health Action Plan for Ontario must be updated and re-launched. We need support for a comprehensive, province-wide plan to improve habitat for wild bees, increase forage for honey bees and wild bees, support urban and rural beekeeping and reduce environmental hazards for all bees from agricultural chemicals or other environmental threats including climate change.

Ontario must get involved with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) to ensure that there is a level playing field for Ontario honey producers who cannot compete with cheap imports. This can be approached from the supply and the demand side with specific support for the promotion of 100% Ontario honey as well as vigilance in the marketplace for low-cost honey that is being dumped into the market.

Thank you for your time and attention and willingness to learn about issues affecting Ontario beekeepers. We invite the government of Ontario to consider working closely with beekeepers on a broader roadmap for protecting insect pollinators and ensuring that Ontario will have a viable and vibrant beekeeping industry – and agri-food industry – for years to come.

Sincerely,



André Flys, President

PS: Should you want to learn more we would be pleased to host you on a tour of a bee yard and a honey production facility.