

STRATEGIC PLAN

2023-2028

Vision, Action, Impact



Message from the Board



We are pleased to share the Ontario Beekeepers' Association's new Strategic Plan that will guide our work from 2023 to 2028. Our last Strategic Directions document covered the period from 2013 to 2018. A lot has changed in the beekeeping world since then.

The pest and disease landscape has brought new threats and new opportunities. For example, small hive beetle, miticide resistant Varroa, new mite treatment options, and antibiotic resistant American Foulbrood across the border in the U.S. were new and unfamiliar when we last undertook strategic planning.

Ontario beekeeping businesses have also changed. The number of hives travelling East for pollination has steadily increased over the last 10 years. More beekeepers are overwintering hives indoors and breeders are exploring the feasibility of overwintering locally produced queens in queen banks.

The Ontario Beekeepers' Association has also changed. In 2013 we were an association of 757 members. Today our membership stands at 1622. That is a 114% increase over 10 years. Finally, the last couple of years has seen dramatic changes in external factors such as the disruptions associated with COVID-19 and current high inflation.

With all these changes, your Board felt we were overdue for some reflection on our strategic direction. We contracted Wilton Consulting Group to support our strategic planning efforts. Wilton Consulting Group carried out a SCOT (Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities and Threats) analysis, conducted a sector survey of more than 550 people, conducted a survey of Board members, held interviews with beekeepers and sector stakeholders, and facilitated a workshop with the OBA Board of Directors. After sifting through all this information, we arrived at the strategic areas of focus outlined in this document.





If we have learned nothing else in the last five years, we have certainly learned to expect the unexpected. COVID-19, tragic world events, and last spring's devastating winter losses highlight the need for this Strategic Plan to be a living document. One that guides us but does not prevent us from dealing with whatever unexpected challenges and opportunities the next 5 years will send our way.

Finally, we would like to thank everyone who helped make this Strategic Plan possible. First and foremost, thank you to all who took the time to provide your thoughts and feedback through the survey or other engagement activities. We could not have done this without your ideas and insights. We also want to thank the team at Wilton Consulting Group (Bronwynne, Krista, and Jessica) for their hard work, thoughtful reflection, and careful synthesis. Finally, we appreciate the contributions of our Working Group members. Kevin Dolan, Kelsey Ducsharm, Mel Kempers, Stephen Moore, and Ian Grant helped guide the process and provided context as the strategic themes emerged.

We look forward to working with all of you to implement this Strategic Plan over the coming 5 years and help achieve our vision of a locally sustainable, prosperous beekeeping industry in Ontario that leads with well-informed beekeepers.

On behalf of the Board,

Ian Grant
Ontario Beekeepers' Association President

Stephen Moore
Chair Governance Committee, Lead
Strategic Working Group

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BACKGROUND

THE ONTARIO BEEKEEPING COMMUNITY

The Ontario Beekeepers' Association (OBA) is one of Canada's oldest agricultural organizations. It was founded in 1881 to represent the interests of Ontario beekeepers. Beekeeping in Ontario is a diverse industry. Ontario is home to many small-scale beekeepers with one or a handful of hives. Ontario also has a vibrant commercial beekeeping sector with beekeepers managing hundreds to thousands of hives. Beekeepers in Ontario produce honey, provide paid pollination services, or breed and sell local honey bee stock. Each of these three business models face unique challenges and opportunities. The OBA's membership has grown steadily over the last 10 years. The OBA now has more than 1,600 members.



GOVERNANCE

The OBA is governed by a Board comprising of 14 OBA members. At least nine of the Board members are commercial beekeepers who manage 50 hives or more. This helps to ensure that members whose livelihoods depend on beekeeping have a strong voice on the Board. The OBA is very lucky to have a diverse membership. Many OBA members have employment outside beekeeping. This provides a rich set of skills and experience that the Board can draw upon when expertise is needed.

FINANCES

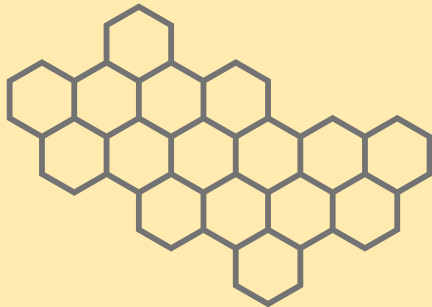
The OBA's strong and consistent membership underpins its finances. Membership fees allow the OBA to employ several key team members who carry out the day-to-day functions of the association. Membership fees are augmented with research and grant funding that allows the OBA to undertake specific projects and initiatives. Regularly prepared financial statements help to ensure the prudent use of the association's funds.

ONTARIO BEEKEEPING AT A GLANCE

There are
3,735
registered beekeepers
and
102,900
registered hives

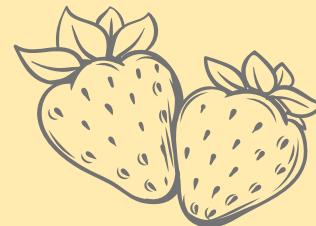


There are
1,622
OBA members



The estimated value of
honey production is
\$37,195,000

In Ontario, **32** of the
economically important
crops are pollinated by bees
and other animals



The estimated value of pollination services is

\$897,000,000

This accounts for roughly

13.4%

of the sales from agricultural crops
grown in Ontario



Figure 1. Interesting facts about Ontario beekeeping and the Ontario Beekeeping Association.

BACKGROUND

HOW WE DELIVER

The OBA seeks to meet the diverse needs of our membership through a variety of programs and initiatives.

Education and Training:

When we conduct our own research or learn about findings from other jurisdictions we play a key role in sharing that information with Ontario beekeepers. The OBA publishes the Ontario Bee Journal which is widely recognized as an excellent source of locally relevant beekeeping news and best management practices. The TTP is internationally recognized for its extension work. The TTP has developed several workshops that cover a range of topics from introductory information in Apiology 101 to more advanced topics such as Integrated Pest Management and Queen Breeding. The TTP also has a [YouTube channel](#) where it releases short how-to videos to support Beekeepers in their adoption of Best Management practices. Each year the OBA hosts a spring and a fall meeting. Additionally, the TTP is active on various other Social Media Channels providing key information about Best Management Practices, Research, Training opportunities, and calendar events, etc. These are further opportunities for beekeepers to network, learn, and participate in professional development opportunities.

Research:

The OBA's Technology Transfer Program (TTP) carries out operational research that has direct benefits for the Ontario beekeeping industry. This includes research such as evaluating methods of overwintering honey bee colonies or investigating new mite treatment protocols. For some specialized research we partner with academic researchers and institutions. Examples include work to identify genetic markers of Africanized honey bees or methods to select and breed for better mite control.

Sub-Associations:

One of the ways that the OBA meets the needs of such a diverse group of beekeepers is through dedicated sub-associations. The Ontario Bee Breeders' Association, the Ontario Honey Bee Pollination Association, and the Ontario Mead Makers Association are all sub-associations of the OBA that focus on the needs of a particular subset of the OBA's membership. Local beekeeping associations are not sub-associations of the OBA but they play an important role in supporting Ontario beekeepers. The OBA works closely with many of Ontario's local beekeeping associations to further support Ontario beekeepers.

BACKGROUND

Member Services:

The OBA provides several services that directly support members. These include the listings on directories hosted on the OBA website, availability of group liability insurance tailored to the beekeeping industry, regular email newsletters that provide members with situational awareness of surveys, funding opportunities, emerging issues, and other topics relevant to beekeepers. Other member services such as the semi-annual meetings, training opportunities, and the Ontario Bee Journal are described under the education and training section below.

Advocacy:

The OBA is the voice of Ontario beekeepers. We respond to emerging challenges and threats to the industry and we also proactively engage to help create the conditions for a thriving beekeeping sector in Ontario. Managed pollinators like honey bees are often seen as an indicator species or the canary in the coal mine. Beekeepers are often the first to see the impacts of changes in our environment. Native pollinators and other insects benefit when we work with partners and advocate for healthy environments for our honey bees.



LOOKING FORWARD

This is an exciting time to be a beekeeper in Ontario, however we continue to face challenges such as high winter losses and increasing production costs (see Figure 1). But, Ontario beekeepers also see many opportunities. There is unmet demand for local Ontario honey, there is a need for even more hives to provide paid pollination services, and the local bee breeding market is developing new techniques to help it meet the strong demand for early queens and nucleus hives. The OBA is looking forward to supporting Ontario beekeepers to overcome the challenges we face and to act on opportunities as they arise. This Strategic Plan outlines how we intend to do this over the coming 5 years.



STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

01

SCOT (Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities, and Threats) Activity

To gain a better understanding of the current state of the OBA, a Working Group was put together to participate in a SCOT activity. The findings from this activity helped provide direction for the open survey, Board survey, and interview guide.

02

Open Survey with Members and Non-Members

A public survey was conducted to get feedback on the successes, limitations, challenges, and opportunities of the OBA and the Ontario beekeeping industry. This survey was open to current, former, and non-OBA members. The survey was available between September 5, 2022, and October 2, 2022 and had 567 respondents.

03

Interviews with Key Informants

Interviews were conducted with 4 key informants in the beekeeping industry to gather more insights into how the OBA can best support Ontario's beekeeping industry. The interviews focused on gaining knowledge on the strengths and weaknesses of the OBA.

04

Board Survey

To supplement the information gathered through the open survey, a Board survey was distributed to dive deeper into some of the topics highlighted in the open survey. Additionally, the survey was used to help Board members discuss the strengths and limitations of the OBA at an organizational level.

05

Board Strategic Planning Session

While drawing on the preliminary findings from the open survey and Board survey, a strategic planning session was held to discuss the direction of the Strategic Plan. At this session, Board members:

- Were presented with the findings from the surveys and interviews
- Provided feedback on draft Mission, Vision, and Values statements

KEY FINDINGS

Through the stakeholder engagement, 4 key findings related to the OBA emerged.

“My membership provides access to Ontario-specific information which I am not likely to get elsewhere.”

- Survey respondent



“The OBA is an important advocate for beekeepers at the policy level and I have confidence that their evidence-based approach to research and knowledge sharing legitimizes the Ontario beekeeping community.”

- Survey respondent

The open survey found:

- 97% of respondents plan to renew their OBA membership in the foreseeable future
- 63% of members who completed the survey were “somewhat” familiar with the OBA and its work, 34% “very”, and 3% “Not at all”

01. EDUCATION

- OBA is a leader in beekeeping education
- The TTP is recognized for providing credible, timely education to beekeepers in Ontario
- The OBA has an opportunity to expand mentorship and networking opportunities

The open survey found:

- Current (82%), former (70%), and non-members (71%) agreed or strongly agreed that the OBA Tech Transfer Program provides useful information for beekeepers

02. ADVOCACY

- OBA is a strong voice for both commercial and small-scale beekeepers in Ontario
- The OBA should continue to provide a cohesive voice for Ontario’s beekeepers
- The OBA’s diverse membership pool is one of its key strengths
- Small-scale and commercial beekeepers have, at times, both competing and complementary needs. The OBA should continue to balance the needs of its diverse membership

The open survey found:

- Current (72%), former (62%), and non-members (67%) agreed or strongly agreed that the OBA is a strong voice for Ontario beekeepers

03. COMMUNICATION

KEY FINDINGS



With Membership

- There are opportunities to improve communication with members such as being clear about membership fee allocation and OBA's full suite of programs

Survey respondents see three opportunities to bolster communications with the public:

- The importance of bees as pollinators
- The quality of local Ontario-made honey and bee products
- Where to find local Ontario honey and bee products

With government

- Increase communication with the Provincial government through reporting success metrics in order to secure long-term funding

With the public

- Activities such as participation at the Royal Winter Fair and social media presence are good means of communicating with the public

“Glad to support an organization who is looking out for the best interests of the beekeeping industry. Their affiliation with other groups like the Canadian Honey Council are important”

- Survey respondent



04. ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE

- The OBA should seek funding to support medium-long term initiatives
- Institutional knowledge should be documented and communicated between outgoing and incoming Board members and staff
- The OBA should continue to measure and communicate the impact of OBA programming

“The OBA's biggest strength is it provides a formal framework for beekeepers to organize and provides a platform for the industry to speak to government. It is the most fully integrated organization for representing small operations (hobbyists) to large commercial operations.”

- Interviewee

SCOT ANALYSIS

A SCOT analysis is a helpful tool to assess the internal and external environment which helps guide strategic planning. Internal elements, including strengths and challenges, are within the OBA's control. External elements, including opportunities and threats, are not within the OBA's control.

STRENGTHS

- OBA has a reputation for being a credible industry leader in research and extension for Ontario beekeepers
- OBA has a diverse membership
- OBA is recognized as the voice for beekeepers in Ontario

CHALLENGES

- OBA's diverse membership means providing resources and programming for a range of beekeepers, from small-scale to commercial beekeeping operations
- Social media platforms spread misinformation and non-local information about beekeeping
- Public awareness of bees and their benefits is limited

OPPORTUNITIES

- Diversify training offerings to support beekeepers to meet environmental and socioeconomic challenges and opportunities
- Education and knowledge-sharing for the general public about the benefits of bees and local bee products
- Public support of pollinators can enable funding opportunities

THREATS

- Climate change impacts, such as extreme weather events, and invasive species threaten bee vitality
- Changes in consumer trends such as veganism and reduced sugar diets may decrease the market for local honey
- The sale of non-local honey competes with Ontario-made honey

Figure 2. Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities, and Threats analysis developed for the 2023-2028 Strategic Plan.

Strategic Plan



Strategic Plan

VISION, MISSION, AND VALUES



VISION

A locally sustainable, prosperous beekeeping industry in Ontario that leads with well informed beekeepers.

MISSION

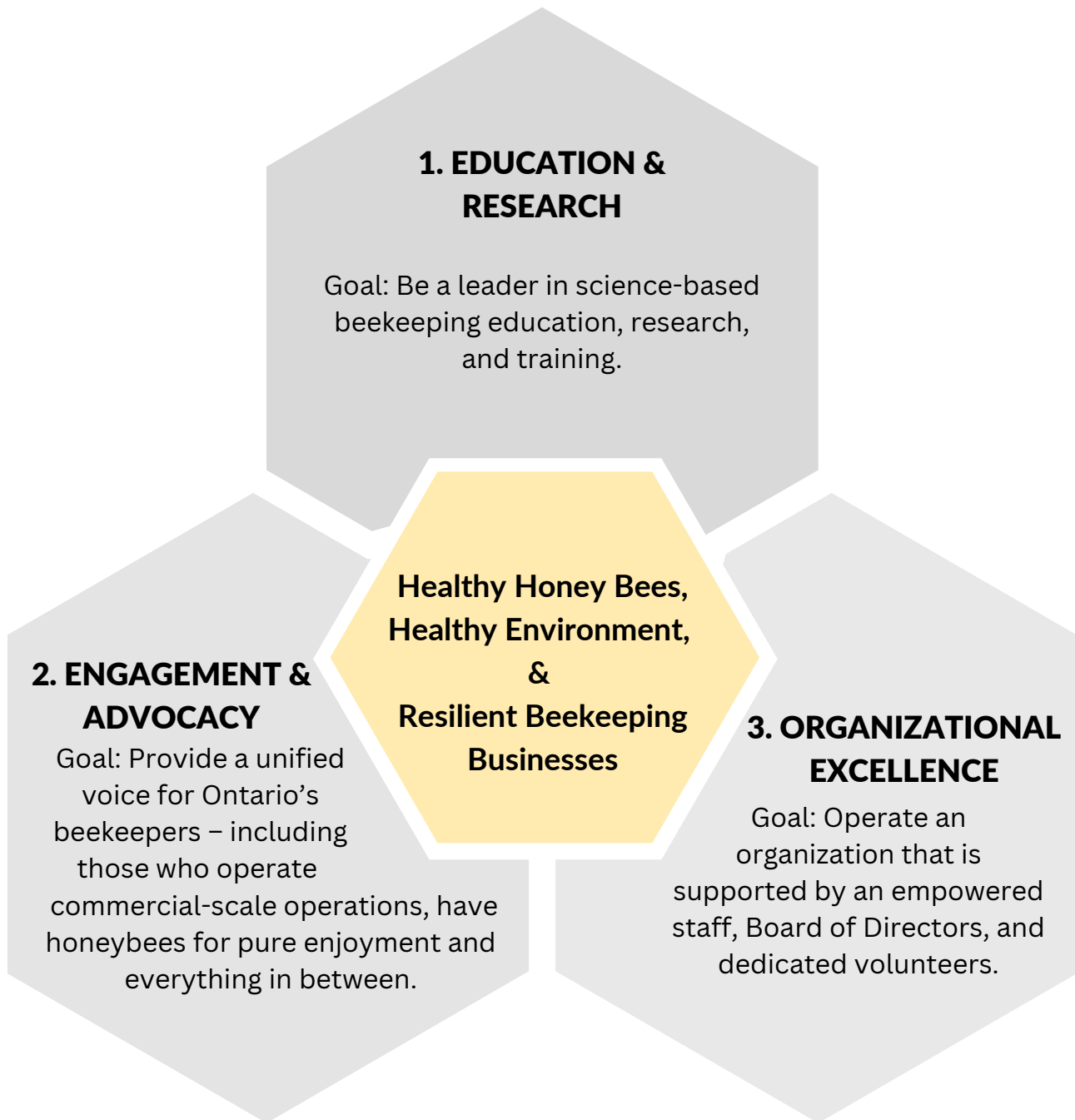
The Ontario Beekeepers' Association provides education and training, supports and conducts research, and is the voice of Ontario's beekeepers.

VALUES

- **Inclusiveness:** We recognize the interdependence and diversity of all beekeepers in Ontario and strive to include everyone.
- **Responsiveness:** We are committed to responding quickly and thoughtfully to urgent issues that could potentially affect beekeepers or the well-being of honeybees.
- **Engagement:** We are committed to ongoing dialogue and engagement through a variety of means with our members, local associations and government stakeholders to further the mission of the OBA.
- **Collaboration:** We foster collaboration among beekeepers and with a broad range of external organizations and initiatives. We are better together.
- **Science Based Education and Research:** The research and education we support is based on the most up-to-date, credible scientific-based knowledge from Ontario and globally.
- **Environmental Responsibility:** We are committed to strategies and policies that support and advance a sustainable environment.

Strategic Plan

STRATEGIC FOCUS AREAS & GOALS



Strategic Plan

01. EDUCATION & RESEARCH

Goal: Be a leader in science-based beekeeping education, research, and training.

	<u>OBJECTIVE</u>	<u>STRATEGIES</u>	<u>HOW WE WILL MEASURE SUCCESS</u>
A	Beekeepers have access to Ontario specific research that addresses current challenges faced by beekeepers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lead operational research that helps define or improve beekeeping best management practices• Collaborate with academic researchers on projects that have an anticipated benefit to Ontario beekeepers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complete two or more operational research projects by 2028• Collaborate on three or more research projects by 2028
B	Beekeepers have access to the training and education opportunities they need to adopt current best management practices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide in-person and online training• Provide workshops with content to reflect evolving best management practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The OBA's education and training priorities are documented in a plan or strategy• At least 4 types of themed workshops delivered each year• At least one new or updated workshop launched each year



Strategic Plan

01. EDUCATION & RESEARCH

	<u>OBJECTIVE</u>	<u>STRATEGIES</u>	<u>HOW WE WILL MEASURE SUCCESS</u>
C	Beekeepers have better knowledge, tools, and supports to grow and/or manage their businesses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Offer business development workshops and/or webinars	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• At least 5 webinars or workshops focused on beekeeper business development offered by 2028
D	Beekeepers have access to high-quality locally produced stock.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bee breeders are supported to produce high quality disease resistant queens• Work with appropriate federal and provincial governmental partners to develop reliable, pertinent, effective, and affordable Commercial Beekeeper Insurance and Support Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• At least some Ontario bee breeders begin selling queens selected for Low Varroa Growth• Breeders striving to overwinter Ontario queens are connected and working together to develop the skills and methods needed for success

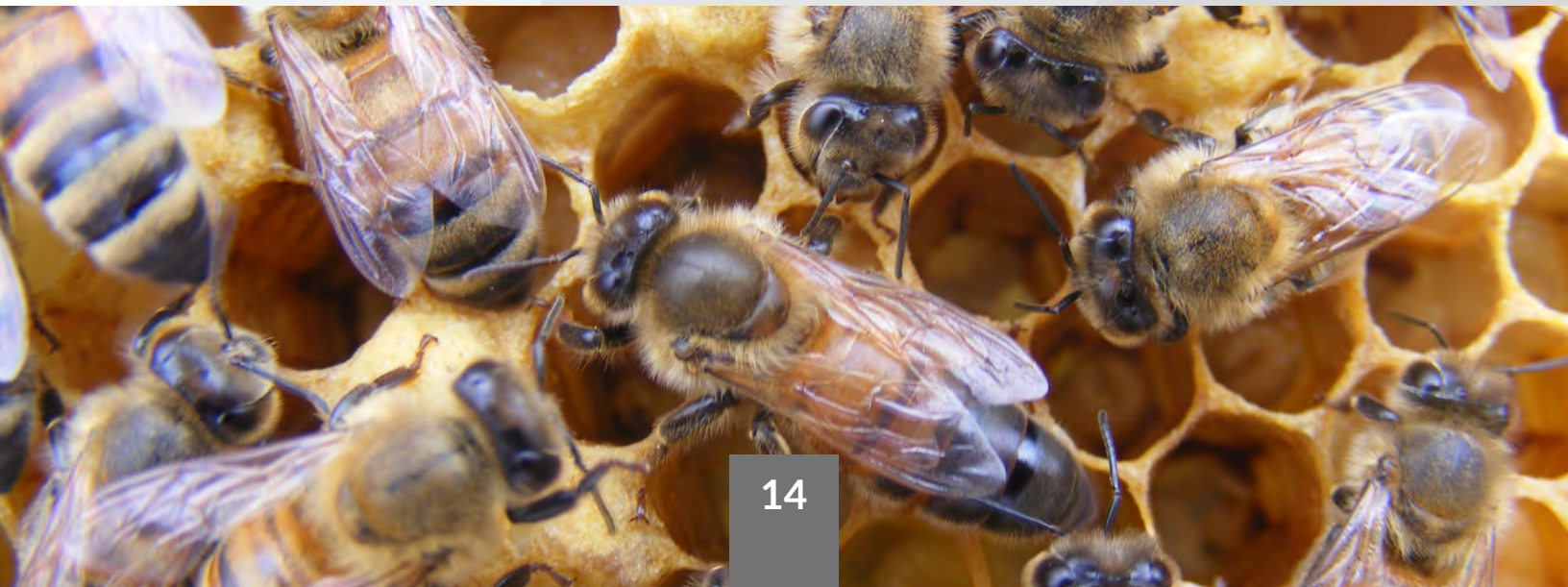


Strategic Plan

02. ENGAGEMENT & ADVOCACY

Goal: Provide a unified voice for Ontario’s beekeepers – including those who operate commercial-scale operations, have honeybees for pure enjoyment and everything in between.

	<u>OBJECTIVE</u>	<u>STRATEGIES</u>	<u>HOW WE WILL MEASURE SUCCESS</u>
A	The OBA continues to develop and deepen its understanding of Ontario beekeepers’ needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Carry out annual membership engagement through surveys, key informant interviews, or focus group discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Annual engagement activity completed each year
B	Retain and grow the OBA’s membership.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue to develop relationships with Local Beekeeping Associations• Develop ways to communicate membership benefits to members and prospective members• Streamline membership renewal processes to improve retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The number of OBA members is at least 50% of the number of registered beekeepers in Ontario by 2028



Strategic Plan

02. ENGAGEMENT & ADVOCACY

	<u>OBJECTIVE</u>	<u>STRATEGIES</u>	<u>HOW WE WILL MEASURE SUCCESS</u>
C	The Ontario public is better informed of the importance of the beekeeping sector and purchasing high quality Ontario honey and bee products.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OBA continues to exhibit at public events, for example, the Royal Winter Fair • The OBA develops and provides resources for LBA's and other interested parties to use for public education at local events (e.g., Fall Fairs, schools, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual attendance at the Royal Winter Fair • At least one new resource developed by 2028
D	Increase government awareness of the critical role beekeeping plays in Ontario.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host awareness raising events. For example, a Queen's Park day to share the importance of Ontario's beekeeping sector with the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and Members of Provincial Parliament 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least two events held with politicians by 2028
E	The OBA has stronger relationships with partners and external stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an external stakeholder engagement plan • Continue to develop relationships with Local Beekeepers Associations • Strengthen relationships with Government organizations and other agriculture and agri-food sector stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The OBA has an external stakeholder engagement plan by 2028

Strategic Plan

03. ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Goal: Operate an organization that is supported by an empowered staff, Board of Directors, and dedicated volunteers.

	<u>OBJECTIVE</u>	<u>STRATEGIES</u>	<u>HOW WE WILL MEASURE SUCCESS</u>
A	Ensure the financial sustainability of the OBA.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek out long term funding opportunities through the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership, Foundations, or other opportunities • Conduct a financial analysis to determine optimal membership rates and identify opportunities to provide further benefits and incentives for membership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By 2028 the OBA submits at least three proposals for longer-term funding of 3 years or greater (or fewer proposals if at least one proposal is funded) • OBA financial reserves remain stable or grow between 2023 and 2028
B	Continue to increase the productivity of the Board and Committee structure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster an impactful and rewarding environment for Board members and volunteers by matching unique skillsets and interests with current priorities • Develop a volunteer management plan that includes tangible appreciation action items (e.g. thank you letters, volunteer luncheons, etc.) • Develop opportunities for volunteers to progressively take on more responsibility anticipating that some may have an interest in joining the Board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least 3 Committee or Working Group led initiatives completed by 2028

Strategic Plan

03. ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE

	<u>OBJECTIVE</u>	<u>STRATEGIES</u>	<u>HOW WE WILL MEASURE SUCCESS</u>
C	OBA operations function seamlessly even when key individuals transition to different roles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure institutional knowledge and processes are maintained by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Documenting key institutional knowledge and processes to facilitate smooth transitions. ◦ Developing succession plans for key staff and Board members ◦ Developing an OBA onboarding document to supplement the Board and committee Terms of Reference. The onboarding document would outline examples of the Board’s responsibilities and past initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Onboarding document developed and shared with the New Board and Committee members
D	OBA work is easily communicated through clearly defined and optimized channels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake a branding and communications review and update • Develop an OBA internal membership Communications Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The OBA website is updated with improved functionality to support the evolving communication needs of the OBA • An OBA internal membership communication Plan is developed

Thank you to our Donors

Thank you to the following organizations for providing generous donations to support the development of this Strategic Plan



Grand River Agricultural Society





**ONTARIO BEEKEEPERS'
ASSOCIATION**
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