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Ontario beekeepers respond to proposed pesticide regulations

Milton, ON. The Ontario Beekeepers' Association, representing Ontario's 3,100 beekeepers, responded today to the Government of Ontario's proposed regulatory changes to the Pesticides Act to address the impact that pesticide exposure is having on pollinator health.

Ontario beekeepers applaud the Province's stand on pollinator health and the need to reduce the current overuse of neonicotinoids on corn and soy. We appreciate the work that went into these regulations. However, with some minor changes, the regulations will be more consistent with the Government's own goals of reducing the acreage treated with neonicotinoids by 80% by 2017 and reducing bee overwinter mortality to 15% by 2020.

In summary, the OBA has made five core recommendations:

1. Under the proposed phased-in scenario, honey bees and beekeepers will not be protected under the full weight of the regulations until the 2020 planting season. OBA recommends that heavy corn and soy planting areas be given first priority and that full implementation be completed before the 2018 growing season.
2. The regulations have created a new Class 12 specifically for neonicotinoid seed treatments. This narrow definition opens the door for substitution of neonicotinoid seed treatments with systemic foliar sprays and soil drenches as well as the development of new systemics. OBA wants this Class to include all systemic pesticides.
3. The proposed regulations are silent on the issue of dosage, which could lead to an increase in the actual volume of neonics put on seeds and exposures via dust, soil and water. OBA recommends dosage/concentration levels of neonics on seeds should be monitored to ensure seed treatments use the lowest dosage necessary.
4. Sweet corn is currently not included in the definition of corn. This exemption neglects the fact that bees are attracted to potentially toxic sweet corn pollen and therefore OBA highly recommends its inclusion.
5. Pollination 'staging' areas and queen breeder locations are particularly vulnerable to poisoning incidents. OBA requests that no neonicotinoids should be used in a 5 km radius from these specified locations.

"We are pleased the government is moving forward with a rigorous regulatory approach to reducing the use of neonicotinoids," said OBA president Tibor Szabo. "However, with a few minor

changes we can ensure pollinator health remains a priority and our beekeeping industry is protected from further damage.”

The Ontario Beekeepers’ Association has represented Ontario beekeepers since 1881. After suffering bee kills associated with neonicotinoid treated seeds throughout Ontario and Quebec in 2012 and 2013, Health Canada declared the continued use of neonicotinoids on corn and soy ‘unsustainable’. In the winter of 2013 and 2014, overwinter losses in Ontario were 58%, almost three times the average for the rest of Canada.

On March 23, 2015, the government of Ontario announced it would take the strongest action in North America to protect bees, birds, butterflies, and other pollinators by proposing new rules that would reduce the number of acres planted with neonicotinoid-treated corn and soybean seeds by 80 per cent by 2017.

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