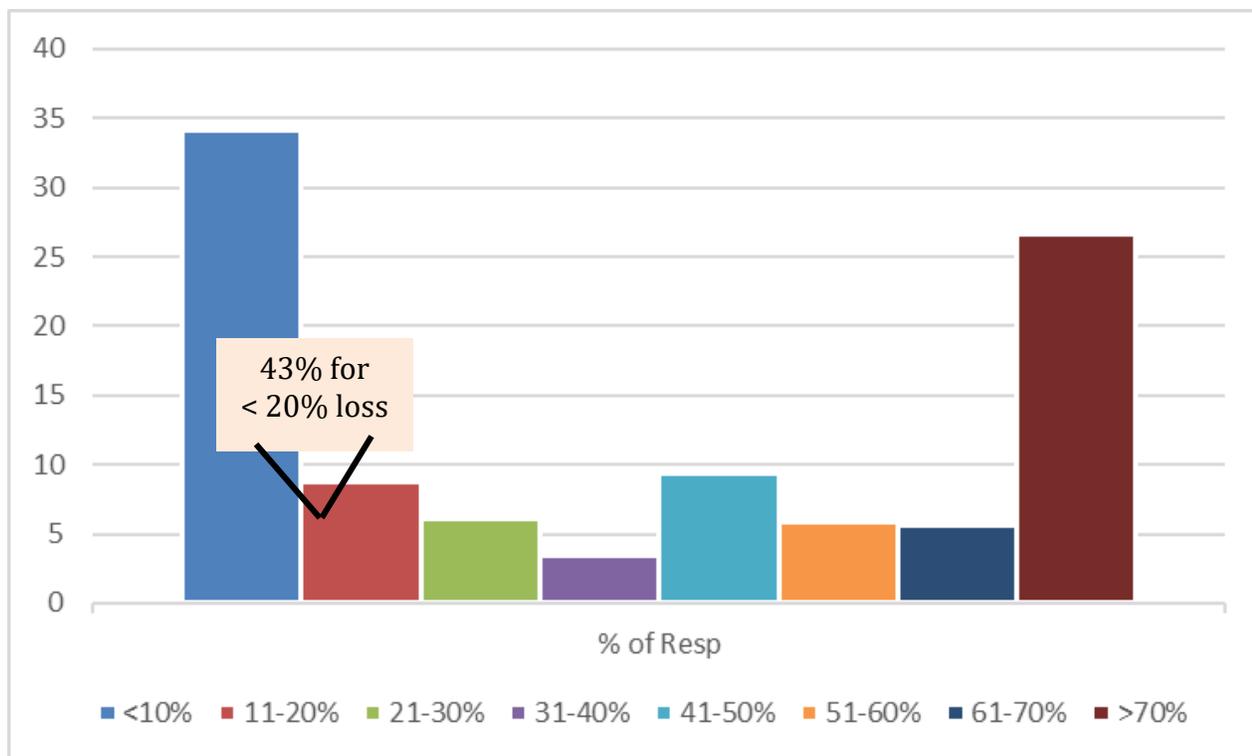




Some Ontario Beekeepers Still Experiencing High Winter Losses, While Others Report Doing Better This Year

Responses to a survey by the Ontario Beekeepers' Association indicated that 26% percent – or one in four Ontario beekeepers – lost more than 70 percent of their colonies this past winter.

34% of beekeepers who participated in the survey report that their hives came through the winter in great shape with less than 10% losses. 43% of respondents had less than 20% loss over the winter. Less than twenty percent colony mortality is the number regarded as the benchmark for sustainable overwinter losses. 65% of the commercial beekeeper respondents had less than 20% losses. However, 26% of respondents reported excessive overwinter losses of more than 70%. These high losses were in various regions of Ontario, and not restricted to one area.



It appears that this trend of low losses in stark contrast with high losses across the province is not new. In 2020, 53% of beekeepers had less than 20% loss, but 19% of beekeepers had more than 70% loss, with the remaining beekeepers again being somewhere in between.

For those with low losses (<20%), the suspected reasons for the losses included: weak colonies, queen problems and a high level of Varroa mites late in the season.

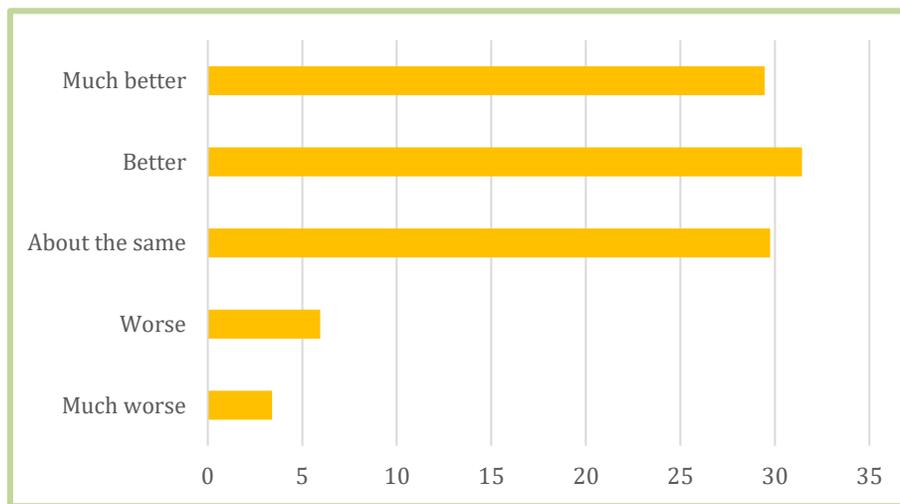
For those with high losses (>70%), similar responses were given for the suspected reasons for losses. An overload of Varroa mites was cited in 43% of these submissions, while 41% indicated fluctuations in winter weather as another reason for the high losses. Weak colonies, queen problems and pesticides were cited within this category as well.

For the beekeepers who mentioned high Varroa mites as a cause of overwinter losses, 35% reported monitoring for mites throughout the season, and 19% reported monitoring for mites in the late summer only. This leaves over 40% without any monitoring techniques at all.

The employment of various strategies for reducing mite loads in the fall included: Formic acid 44%, Apivar 13%, Bayvarol 8%, and oxalic acid 41% (either alone or along with a previous treatment).

For those who had low winter losses (<20%), 29% reported treating Varroa with Apivar, 32% used formic acid, and 38% used oxalic acid (either alone or along with a previous treatment).

Beekeepers feel their bees are doing about the same, better or much better this year.



For those needing to recover from winter losses, buying nucs, buying packages and splitting hives were the most common responses.

With an early spring, early hot weather, cold rainy snaps and frequent weather changes, 2021 has been a difficult year for beekeeping thus far. This survey is directional only. It is not intended to be conclusive. However, many of the reasons given for losses, especially losses due to mites, are well within beekeeper control. Continuing to learn from experience, seeking training and education and relying on best management practices specific to Ontario is recommended to ensure that the bee's health is a priority.