



Protecting Pollinators Rebuilding Public Trust

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Today, there is increasingly more awareness about social license and public trust, meaning the expectation that those who operate within minimal regulatory or market restrictions will adhere to generally-held public values. In short, they will do what's right.

As beekeepers, we are particularly sensitive to this trust. Not only do we deliver a pure product from flower to table, but we are also acutely aware that our bees are responsible for pollinating most of the fruit and vegetables grown in Ontario.

Our social license is inherent to our craft. Few scrutinize how we produce the honey that sits on the kitchen table because the answer is, we don't produce honey. Bees do. Our job is to keep our bees healthy and to reap the harvest from their hard work.

Public trust is essential when you bottle and sell honey directly to the public. 100% Ontario honey, sold mostly at farmers' markets and at farm-gates or local stores, has no additives or preservatives. Our public demands a pure, unadulterated honey, and we provide it.

But over the past few years, we have become very concerned about current agricultural practices and their effect on public trust. The current overuse of systemic pesticides is not only killing bees, but these neurotoxins are showing up in our water and in our food. In Health Canada's Pesticide Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) tests of bees killed by neonics, 90% of hives had these neurotoxins in the pollen and comb that was tested. No doubt traces of these pesticides are also in our honey.

Neonicotinoids are the most widely used pesticides in the world. They migrate throughout the plant, including pollen and nectar. They persist in soil and ground water. So it's no surprise that researchers in Québec have found traces of neonicotinoids in every stream and river they tested. Or that traces of neonicotinoids are commonly detected in foods, including the milk that our children drink.

When we sell food that contains traces of pesticides we are violating the trust that the public puts in beekeepers. Sadly, there's little we can do about it, other than inform the

public and advocate for regulatory controls.

Unfortunately, the responsibility that goes along with the privilege of social license and the need for public trust of our food industry has not been embraced by the agricultural chemical industry. This industry represents a concentration of power in four or five multinational corporations that control the manufacture of agricultural chemicals, seed production, bio-engineering, and even the distribution of these products.

This week Pope Francis, in his encyclical on climate change and the environment, described our *relentless exploitation and destruction of the environment*, for which he blamed apathy, the reckless pursuit of profits, excessive faith in technology and political short-sightedness.

We can only imagine that the profits at stake in the continued sales of neonicotinoids are staggering. Yet beekeepers have been blamed for advocating for regulations that would limit access to those harmful pesticides over-promoted by agricultural chemical companies. Clearly, those who lobby for unregulated access to pesticides when they are not needed place profits above the greater social and economic good of protecting pollinators. And in so doing, they have lost the public trust.

Public trust is fragile entity. We ask the government to respond to public concerns by monitoring and reporting on systemic pesticides in the environment and in our food. We encourage the Government of Ontario to disregard the pressures of well-resourced and aggressive industry lobbyists and to press on with all due speed to reach their goal to protect pollinators and our food supply by reducing the use of neonicotinoids by 80% by 2017.

That is the best thing you can do to preserve public trust for our food and for our hard-working farmers.