



ALBERTA  
AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

*Office of the Minister  
MLA, Whitecourt-St. Anne*



July 22, 2015

Ms. Helen Price  
AUMA President  
300, 8616-51 Avenue  
Edmonton, AB T6E 6E6

Dear Ms. Price:

Thank you for your June 26, 2015, letter sharing the Alberta Urban Municipality Association's (AUMA) concerns regarding bee and pollinator insect populations. I appreciate the opportunity to provide the following information, including an update on the work of the National Bee Health Roundtable (BHRT).

The Government of Alberta (GOA) recognizes that bee health is a complex matter that is affected by many interacting factors, including weather, pests, diseases, pesticides used on crops or inside bee hives, cropping systems, and native bee habitat. Alberta Agriculture and Forestry (AF) is committed to ensuring a healthy and sustainable environment, which includes not only honey bees, native pollinators and many other beneficial insect species, but also a healthy and sustainable farm community.

Alberta is an active member of the BHRT, with several key staff from my Ministry participating in all meetings to date to develop plans and identify actions to address risks and opportunities related to bee health. The BHRT encompasses a wide range of stakeholders from across both the agricultural and environmental value chain, including beekeepers, professional apiculturists, agriculture producers, seed companies, pesticide companies, government regulators, and Agrologists. The BHRT has formed seven working groups to address various issues to improve bee health: Varroa mite control, control of pesticide exposure, minor use of pesticides, Apiculture research, bee nutrition, forage sources for bees, and communications.

Despite being established for less than one year, the BHRT has already developed several initiatives and actions to address bee health, including finding alternative miticides, developing a control system for the devastating Varroa mite based on an integrated pest management strategy, working towards harmonising the honey bee health surveillance program across provinces, accelerating implementation and adoption of the national biosecurity standards in beekeeping, continuing to improve and develop a robust monitoring system for bee mortality, re-evaluation of pesticides safety on bees and the environment, and improving the management practices of beekeepers and growers to provide a healthy safe environment for bees, pollinators, and agricultural crops. These activities are being initiated as projects across the country, and will ultimately make a difference for our bees and the environment.

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I would also like to share with you and AUMA that Alberta is, in fact, a success story. Despite media reports and several jurisdictions airing concerns regarding bee and native pollinator decline, the number of bees in Alberta has doubled between 1989 and 2014. Since the border closure to bee imports from the United States (US), Alberta is the only Canadian jurisdiction to see such large increases in colony numbers. In 2014, Alberta beekeepers reported having 283,000 bee colonies (43 per cent of the total colonies reported in Canada).

Certainly, the bee industry has faced challenges, losing on average 30-45 per cent of their bee colonies annually between 2006 and 2010, which was double the generally-accepted annual loss of 15 per cent. When winter mortality reaches the 30-45 per cent per annum, the estimated annual cost to Alberta beekeepers is \$54 million per year, and prolonged losses of this magnitude threaten the viability of the industry. In response to these challenges, AF and the Alberta Beekeepers Commission established a surveillance program to assess bee health, monitor honey bee survival, study causes of bee mortality, and implement aggressive educational program to adopt best management practices to mitigate bee health issues. The initiative resulted in a reduction of over-wintering bee mortality from 30-45 per cent per year from 2006-2010, to 10-24 per cent per year since 2011. In fact, this past winter, over-wintering losses was 10.6 per cent, and it is expected that the number of bee colonies in Alberta will increase by up to 10 per cent in 2015. With the exception of Ontario, Canadian over-wintering losses were equal to or less than the 15 per cent target.

As you may know, several jurisdictions inspired by special interest groups have aired concerns regarding the safety of Neonicotinoid (neonic) insecticides for bees and the environment, using recent reports of bee disappearance in the US known as "Colony Collapse Disorder" as evidence to support their claims. The neonics are a relatively new class of synthetic pesticides that are chemically similar to nicotine, and are mainly used as a seed treatment for many crops for protection from pests, among them canola, cereal, corn, and pulse crops, along with many horticultural crops. The annual average value of these crops is \$6.1 billion in Alberta. The neonic products replaced older highly toxic seed, soil, and foliar-applied pesticides, are mainly applied to the seed, and are considered less risky for bees and pollinators compared to foliar applied pesticides. Nevertheless, I can assure you that AF monitors the potential impact of pesticide use on honey bees and other pollinators in conjunction with the Pest Management Regulatory Agency and Alberta's Ministry of Environment and Parks. In Alberta, only two cases of bee kill relating to pesticides were reported in 2012, with no reports in either 2013 or 2014, and both cases in 2012 were due to a failure to follow label directions for the proper application of the pesticides. Even in years Alberta experienced high bee mortality, losses were not linked to neonic use. There are over six million acres of canola seeded yearly in Alberta, and twenty million total in Western Canada, and all are treated with neonics - but colony losses have not been attributed to neonic use.

The long-term statistics indicate that Alberta has a successful bee health management program. AF continues to invest in research to maintain and improve honeybee and pollinator health. The value of AF's research investment from 2014 to 2018 is estimated to be more than \$5.0 million, and includes studies on managing bee health, bee habitat, and biosecurity.

Please be assured that the Government of Alberta strongly supports AF's involvement with the BHRT, Canada's federal agencies, the Alberta bee industry, and all agricultural stakeholders to advocate for Alberta's interests in managing both a healthy sustainable honey bee industry, and a productive agriculture system.

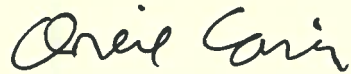
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I trust this information has been helpful. However, if you have any further questions regarding the apiculture program and bee health issues, please feel free to contact Dr. Medhat Nasr, Alberta's Provincial Apiculturist, at 780-415-2314.

Thank you for sharing your concerns.

Sincerely,



Oneil Carlier  
Minister