

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

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Opening Statement from CropLife Canada
Dennis Prouse, Vice President, Government Affairs

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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee,

Thank you for inviting us here today. My name is Dennis Prouse, and I am Vice President, Government Affairs of CropLife Canada. With me is my colleague Pierre Petelle, Vice President Chemistry for CropLife Canada. We are pleased to talk about the government response to this Committee's report on Bee Health, and more broadly about the state of pollinator health in Canada today.

CropLife Canada is the trade association representing the manufacturers, developers and distributors of plant science technologies, including pest control products and plant biotechnology, for use in agriculture, urban and public health settings. It may come as a surprise to some that our members also develop products for use in bee hives to protect them against pests such as Varroa mites and various insect predators.

We strive to ensure that the benefits of plant science innovations can be enjoyed by both farmers and consumers. CropLife Canada promotes sustainable agricultural practices and we are committed to protecting human health and the environment.

We also work very closely with a number of stakeholder groups. We are proud of the fact that all of Canada's major farmer-based grower groups are members of our *GrowCanada* partnership.

Overall, we were pleased with the thoughtfulness and depth of the report this Committee produced last year on Bee Health. The Committee report clearly acknowledged that pollinator health is a complex issue, and that the challenges faced by pollinators are multi-factoral. The recommendations made to government were measured and reflected the broad array of stakeholders involved in the file.

Similarly, we have been pleased with the Government of Canada's approach on pollinator health. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada has taken practical steps such as establishing the national Roundtable on Honeybee Health, and Health Canada's Pest Management Regulatory Agency has continued to take a collaborative and science based approach to the regulation of pesticides, both for the treatment of varroa mites in honeybee hives and on neonicotinoid based pesticides that are vital to modern agriculture.

We have seen PMRA continue to work collaboratively with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and earlier this year announce a preliminary re-evaluation decision on one of the three most common neonicotinoid based agricultural

pesticides. PMRA found that this product was safe when used as directed, and did not pose an undue risk to honeybee populations.

It is useful for us to look at some of the key developments on pollinator health in Canada since this Committee last examined the issue. We know that 2016 incident reports to PMRA on bee deaths continued to trend downward, continuing the 2014 and 2015 trend of lower numbers of incidents around time of planting – in fact an 85% reduction from 2013 levels. We expect that PMRA will publish a summary report later this year.

We also know that for 2015/16, overwintering losses for honeybees were very low. It was 16.8% overall for Canada, with 17.9% for Ontario. It is also worth noting that pesticides were not mentioned by beekeepers as a major contributory factor for overwinter losses anywhere in Canada.

The number of managed honeybee colonies in Canada has now hit over 700,000 for the first time since the 1980s. Not coincidentally, that was the time just before the varroa mite came to Canada, and the border was closed to the importation of Queens from the United States. The number of managed honeybee colonies in Ontario and Quebec continues to rise also, at over 100000 in Ontario and over 50000 in Quebec. These numbers have been rising steadily since the early 2000s,

which is when the first neonicotinoid based treated seeds began being used in those provinces.

Across our industry there has been unprecedented value chain cooperation on honeybee health initiatives. There has been the development of best management practices for farmers, outreach and education efforts, new seed bag label language, new seed box lubricant and seeding equipment, and ongoing polymer research. The amount of progress made in such a short time by agriculture to address concerns about the impact of seeding on pollinators has been remarkable. The results show in the overall numbers.

We are also exceptionally proud of two other initiatives – our Bee Connected App, and our Bees Matter initiative.

The Bee Connected app was developed in conjunction with the Canadian Honey Council, and is designed for better communication between beekeepers and those applying pesticides, both farmers and professional applicators. Beekeepers can find where and when pesticides are to be used, and those using products can locate hives and communicate with each other. It is modeled after a successful similar app in Australia, and adapted for Canada. Both beekeepers and pesticide users alike have found it to be very useful, and we hope that the app will continue to grow in popularity.

Our Bees Matter initiative is a public education campaign launched by CropLife Canada and supported by a number of our member companies and grower groups such as Grain Farmers of Ontario. In addition to better informing Canadians about key facts on pollinators, Bees Matter has distributed over 65,000 packets of pollinator friendly wild flower seeds to individual Canadians, providing valuable habitat. To help distribute these seeds we have sponsored and partnered with the Communities in Bloom campaign nationally.

Finally, we are proud of our partnership with Nature Conservancy Canada. Our sponsorship allowed Nature Conservancy Canada to develop a small parcel of land in Norfolk County, Ontario back to its natural state with an emphasis on pollinator friendly habitat. It has allowed Nature Conservancy Canada to study which habitat is most successful for maintaining and growing important wild pollinator-friendly vegetation.

The bee health issue is complex and we will continue to play a role both with farmers and with beekeepers. The current situation in Canada is quite good and we're proud to be doing our part. All this despite unnecessary, punitive restrictions being imposed on Ontario growers around the use of treated seeds. We are encouraged that at the federal level at least, science is trumping politics on this issue.

To conclude, Mr. Chair, we were pleased to see that both this Committee's report, and the government response, took a wide ranging, science based view of the pollinator issue. We continue to work with both Health Canada's PMRA and with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada on a wide range of issues related to pollinator health. We believe that pollinators and modern agriculture both need each other and can thrive together, and we believe that our actions and achievements to date with our stakeholder partners demonstrates that commitment. We thank you and the Committee again for inviting us, and we would welcome any questions you may have.