

Presentation to the  
House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

Ms. Anne Fowlie, Executive Vice-President

**Study: Bee Health Monitoring in Canada**

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May 30, 2016

Mr. Chairman and Committee members, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to speak within the context of your study on **Bee Health Monitoring in Canada**.

The Canadian Horticultural Council is no stranger to this Committee and, as always, appreciates the chance to come before you to raise matters of concern to our sector and to highlight successes. In the past we have presented to you on matters such as research and innovation and the importance of the AAFC **AgrInnovation Program**, which enables the successful Science Clusters, **Bill C-18 – the Agricultural Growth Act**, specifically provisions respecting Plant Breeders' Rights well as on a wide range of competitiveness matters. I had the opportunity to come before you earlier this month to speak about the *Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act* and the critical need for appropriate financial risk mitigation tools for Canada's fresh fruit and vegetable farmers. We appreciate the work that you do and the thoughtful questions that you always pose.

**ABOUT US: THE CANADIAN HORTICULTURAL COUNCIL (CHC)**

We represent growers, shippers and packers from across Canada primarily involved in the production and packing of over 100 fruit and vegetable crops from apples to zucchini. Our active mission statement focuses on four key words: innovative, profitable, sustainable and generations.

The CHC represents members on a number of key issues such as crop protection, access to a consistent supply of farm labour, food safety and traceability, fair access to markets and research and innovation. Our mission is to ensure a more innovative, profitable and sustainable horticultural industry for future generations. Horticulture producers are committed to ensuring that strong Canadian farms will continue to be able to provide safe, secure and healthy food for families in Canada, and around the world. We have a demonstrable record of success in this regard, which includes:

- Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program, established 50 years ago due to the vision and leadership of the day; the Government of Canada and the CHC were signatories to the original bilateral agreements with the Caribbean countries and today nearly 20,000 workers come to work on Canada's horticultural farms each season. In addition to meeting horticulture's labour needs, the program is one of Canada's most important and compelling foreign aid success stories
- Establishment of the Dispute Resolution Corporation (DRC) under article 707 of NAFTA
- CHC was integral to the establishment of the (AAFC) Pest Management Centre
- CHC developed and established CanadaGAP, the on-farm food safety program for Canadian grown fruit and vegetables and the first Canadian food safety program benchmarked to the Global Food Safety Initiative
- CHC is an active participant in a number of Value Chain Roundtables, including the Bee Health Roundtable

## **THE HORTICULTURAL SECTOR**

With a primary production value of over \$5 billion and after-packing or processing value of \$10 billion, horticulture is one of Canada's largest, and certainly most diverse, agricultural production sectors. Horticulture has been an engine for economic growth and will be a foundation for continuing job growth.

### **Horticulture is one of Canada's Largest Agri-food Industries**

An overall objective is to ensure further growth the sector. Today, farm gate sales, with additional processing, supply chain, and induced impacts create an economic footprint of \$11.4 billion in real GDP. Horticulture is a key contributor to Canada's overall economic well-being and to the health and wellness of Canadians.

There are many growth success stories in horticulture – most notably blueberry production in both Eastern and Western Canada. Of course, there are other examples across Canada and other crops. The AAFC Market Access Secretariat team was successful in opening the Chinese market for Canadian cherries and there are other good news stories just waiting to happen. Many things factor into success, not the least of which is good production, management and stewardship practices at the farm.

## **THE TOPIC AT HAND – MONITORING BEE HEALTH**

It's no secret that the agricultural industry relies heavily on both crop protection products and pollinators, like bees. **The horticulture sector is an exemplary model of successful coexistence between farmers, production and a robust pollinator population.** This coexistence is an absolute must: no bees – no food; and conversely, no crop management products – no food. Apples, blueberries and cherries are particularly striking examples of this. The blueberry industry, for example, is very dependent on pollination, according to Gary Brown, Blueberry Tech Support Manager at Nova Scotia's Oxford Frozen Foods, "We average about 100 million blooms per acre, so bees are very, very important in getting our crop pollinated." Every berry, every apple – is the direct result of pollinator activity.

I am not a scientist and as such will not be presenting to you in that capacity. The Canadian Horticultural Council firmly believes in a science-based approach to topics such as the one you are currently addressing. We rely on research, innovation and a conducive regulatory environment to bring forward new technologies and chemistries.

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF BEES AND BEE HEALTH**

Pollinators are an important part of agricultural success in Canada. Canada's horticultural sector is an admirable model of the coexistence that exists – and which can in fact thrive – between producers, bees and production practices. Fortunately, hive numbers have increased significantly over the last 20 years and are the highest they have ever been, according to Statistics Canada. In 2014, there were over 8,000 beekeepers in Canada keeping over 600,000 hives. That was a 24% increase in hives since 2000. Global honey bee populations are also increasing. Risk management and mitigation are absolutely critical to the growth.

Recent specific incidents of Canadian declines in honeybee and other pollinator populations have generated considerable scientific and public interest. Although a number of factors are seen as potential contributors to these declines, no single factor has been identified as the main cause. It is fair to say, though, that our northern climate and harsh winters may well be the most significant factors impacting bee survival.

Insecticide-treated seeds have been in use for about a decade and farmers choose to use them because they provide valuable protection to crops during their early stages of development, which results in healthier plants and increased yields. Farmers used to have to spray an entire field with an insecticide to fend off pests. **Insecticide-treated seeds limit the quantity of pesticide used, provide targeted protection of crops against insects and reduce potential exposure of non-target organisms.**

Neonicotinoids have become an important pest management tool in horticulture, including their use in Integrated Pest Management (IPM) programs, as they represent an effective means to control targeted insect pests during the crop production season. Experts agree that over the last number of years, there have been concerns raised both in Canada and around the world about long-term pollinator health. Canadian, and other, bee researchers overwhelmingly agree that the main stressors to bees are pests and parasites diseases, inadequate diet and weather conditions. The international research community has been working to determine and characterize the impact of all of these factors, including neonicotinoid insecticides on bee health, for several years. For an industry that already struggles with a limited number of crop protection products, an outright ban would be devastating.

Both bees and pesticides play critical roles in agriculture. Bees pollinate many important crops while pesticides protect crops from pest and disease damage. As such, the plant science industry is committed to ensuring that both bees and agriculture co-exist and thrive.

Coexistence is possible and is enhanced through increased communication. A few years ago it may have been that growers were not necessarily aware of all of the steps which could be taken. As a result of heightened awareness on this issue, growers have become aware of practical steps they can take in their fields.

Health concerns in managed bee populations are not unique to a specific province or provinces. Similar problems have been facing beekeepers in other areas of the world including the United States and Europe. Canada's Pest Management Regulatory Agency is also working with a range of organizations, including the United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA), the European Food Safety Authority, and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's Pesticide Effects on Insect Pollinators Working Group, to better understand and assess the effects of pesticides on pollinators.

Also, the PMRA is working with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, provincial governments, grain growers, beekeepers, and the pesticide industry to determine what other options exist that would protect honeybees (including other pollinators) and the environment, while allowing for the continued use of seed treatments for corn and soybean. A recent PMRA report on seed treatment found that the class of products in question did not pose a risk to bee health.

Pollinator health is a complex issue that is impacted by multiple factors. By focusing exclusively on pesticides, the potential to understand the impact of other contributing factors is being overlooked. Farmers understand that pollinators are essential to having healthy crops; more than half of the bee colonies in Canada contribute to the pollination of canola each year and pollinators are also needed for the production of other key crops, including blueberries, apples and cherries.

A number of agricultural organizations have collaborated to develop best management practices, including for planting insecticide-treated seed, which are realistic solutions for growers to follow to help protect pollinators during the spring planting season.

An August 2013 Time magazine cover article put the critical importance of honeybees and other pollinators into meaningful everyday context: "You can thank the Western honeybee for one in every three mouthfuls you'll eat today."

Canadian horticultural producers know that there is a need for both crop protection products and pollinators; the loss of either could have devastating consequences for the industry and consumers.

Some of our members are the biggest clients of commercial beekeepers in the country. In fact, one of the big issues, particularly for the horticultural sector, is the lack of available bees for pollination. One thing is clear; both bee keepers and horticultural producers and other stakeholders are working together to find a fair and reasonable solution that meets the needs and protects the interests of all parties affected. Our sector is fully committed to doing so.

In closing, **growth opportunities lay ahead for both producers and** beekeepers. Colony numbers continue to grow, demand from our industry is also growing, so a healthy industry is essential. It looks like we collectively are on track to achieve this. I have no doubt that the commitment from each, as well as from the other relevant stakeholders, will ensure that the opportunities are realized.as we collectively and collaboratively focus on real strategies to grow the industries. **Successful coexistence is not optional.**