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NEWS BRANTFORD-BRANT

Brant council supports farm groups in 'neonic' issue



By Michael-Allan Marion, Brantford Expositor
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PARIS – Brant County council agrees with a call by farm groups on the Ontario government to use a “science-based” approach to cure problems of pollinator health, rather than just curb the use of neonicotinoids.

Council approved a resolution to that effect Tuesday after hearing from a delegation made up of the Brant County Federation of Agriculture, the Ontario soil and Crop Improvement Association and the Grain Farmers of Ontario.

The delegation, led by Larry Davis, a director with the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, warned council that several farm groups are concerned about the Ontario government's intention to curb the use of neonicotinoid pesticide treatments in corn and soybean production in 80% of fields as the main answer to arresting a decline in bee and other pollinator populations.

The government has posted its plan on the Environmental Bill of Rights registry and is holding a public consultation exercise.

Alarmed grain grower groups and farm federations are raising a cry about the way the government is approaching the issue.

“Today more than ever, farmers are being scrutinized by uninformed environmentalists and other groups who are ignoring or skewing facts and evidence when they portray, with huge publicity, an image of farming and food,” Davis said.

“They have no credibility. Yet people who believe their spooof, send them more and more money to

continue.”

Davis said the farm groups are making the rounds of municipal councils, asking for support in a request that the provincial government “follow the science and evidence-based agenda.”

He said that agenda started in 2012 when beekeeper groups and the agriculture industry began taking an interest in the dramatic decline in bee populations.

Davis recalled that all council candidates in the last municipal election said they support agriculture.

"I'm asking you now to support us."

He noted that neonicotinoids are a federal government-approved pesticide through the Pest Management Regulatory Agency.

“Ontario government's restriction of use will once again override the federal government's licensing of products as was done with 2-4-D previously.”

Since most corn and soybean crops in Ontario use neonicotinoids, the restriction could cost Ontario farmers \$600 million, he said.

Coun. Brian Coleman, a farmer, said reaction to the government's initiative has given rise to an “emotional issue.” He said he would like Brant and other councils support the call for a balanced approach.

The Ontario Beekeepers Association, which has different views on the neonic problem, had wanted to make a presentation to council, too. They had earlier been told they were too late to get on the agenda for Tuesday's meeting.

Two representatives showed up at the meeting. Eddy told them that they could be allowed to speak “in the interests of democracy,” but they said they weren't prepared because they thought they wouldn't be allowed.

Council agreed to a compromise and passed a resolution of support. The beekeepers group will make a presentation at the next meeting, and if any amendments to the resolution are necessary, they will be made.

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For more coverage of the 'neonic' issue and other matters before council on Tuesday, check out multimedia journalist Michael-Allan Marion's live blog of the proceedings.

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