

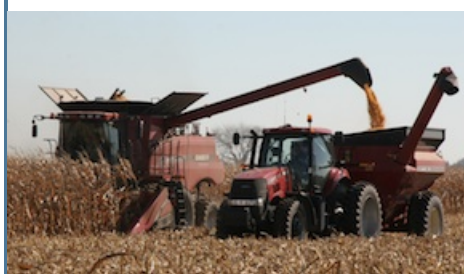


## New Ontario farm group sounds alarm about pending environmental regulation

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Farm Action Now, a coalition formed this month, wants province to appoint agriculture commissioner to advise on regulation



By JIM ALGIE

Expected new environmental regulations "threaten the future of Ontario's farming sector," Grain Farmers of Ontario chair Henry Van Ankum said in a statement issued, Thursday.

Calling for "access to science and technology such as pesticides and seed treatments," Van Ankum and Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association chairman Ray Duc announced formation of a new, four-member coalition called Farm Action Now. The group's first meeting, Wednesday, yielded Thursday's announcement.

A coalition of commodity groups representing grain, hog and bean growers as well as the fruit and vegetable association, Farm Action Now seeks "a balanced plan . . . to reasonably evaluate the challenges with agricultural policy and process," Thursday's statement says.

"This isn't just about farmers – it's about the future of Ontario as a whole," Duc is quoted to say in the statement. "We want to send a message from farmers and about farmers but one that is aimed at benefitting all Ontarians," Duc said.

It's the latest skirmish in what appears to be an escalating battle over neonicotenoid pesticides and their disputed role in honey bee colony collapse. The word "neonicotenoid" does not appear in Thursday's published statement but it's clearly part of the background.

Interviewed late Thursday, following a long day that began on the combine, Van Ankum said pending neonic regulations are only part of the story.

"That's the issue today; it could be a different issue tomorrow that might impact more heavily on the livestock sector or the horticultural sector," said Van Ankum, who farms near Alma. "The pending regulations we feel will be coming towards the use of neonics on corn and soybeans in the province is really the thin edge of the wedge and that there might be many more heavy impact regulations to come," he said.

Thursday's announcement follows a recent meeting among Van Ankum, two other

Grain Farmers' representatives and Ontario Environment Minister Glen Murray. An entry published in Grain Farmers' newsletter last week describes the meeting as "an opportunity to provide Murray with an overview of our commitment to protecting pollinators." The newsletter also said the minister "raised a number of concerns related to agriculture, the environment and climate change."

In an emailed statement to Better Farming, Thursday, before the Farm Action Now announcement, Murray's spokesman Lucas Malinowski said the meeting was an opportunity "to discuss the ways in which we can work together to promote sustainable farming and agriculture in Ontario." Both Murray and Leal are "interested in hearing the perspectives of farmers on ways in which we can work together to protect the environment and pollinators," he said. Malinowski could not be reached later for direct reaction to the Farm Action Now announcement.

Van Ankum has held many such meetings with government officials in recent weeks. But those sessions and mandate letters issued in September by Premier Kathleen Wynne to both Murray and Leal show "a real drive to have a heavy impact on current farming practices," the grain farmers chairman said. He defended existing farm practices as "sound" for "our land and our communities and the environment around us."

The new group seeks broad consultation among farmers and beekeepers, rural government officials and chambers of commerce. It "strongly urges" appointment of a commissioner to advise the government on regulatory measures and to "help grow the agricultural sector." The coalition is open to additional farm groups, the statement said.

Premier Kathleen Wynne's mandate letter to her newly-appointed agriculture minister sought "meaningful" and "measurable" reductions of neonicotinoid use for the 2015 growing season. The premier's letter also directs introduction by 2016 of a system of permits and regulations requiring cuts in the use of neonicotinoid-treated seeds.

In early October, Leal told *Better Farming* reporter Susan Mann he's working "to identify tangible ways to reduce the use of neonicotinoid-treated seeds for the 2015 growing season." Van Ankum said at the time, the government plan is "not feasible" because seed purchases had already begun. Thursday's announcement indicates Van Ankum, for one, is ready to pull out the stops to challenge the province's yet-to-be announced plan.

"We believe the way the province wants to be guided so much by environmental special interests rather than considering what the needs are of its strong, agricultural industry is a misguided way to form policy in this province," Van Ankum said.

Issues about neonic chemicals seem only to be escalating in Ontario and elsewhere.

One manufacturer of neonicotinoid seed treatments, Syngenta, has applied for license in both Canada and the United States to permit a formulation for uses as a foliar spray. Syngenta's move coincides with re-evaluations by both Canadian and U.S. governments of neonicotinoid pesticide use. In late June, U.S. President Barack Obama authorized Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack to create a national Pollinator Health Strategy by early 2015 in response to widespread concern.

A class action lawsuit launched on behalf of bee keepers in early September in the Ontario Superior Court of Justice claims damages exceeding \$400 million from two defendant chemical makers: Bayer Inc. and Syngenta.

This story will continue to be updated as developments unfold. **BF**

## Comments

an online visitor replied on November 14, 2014 - 7:29pm [PERMALINK \(/COMMENT/14844#COMMENT-14844\)](#)

### **[CURRENT AG. IS NOT SOUND. \(/COMMENT/14844#COMMENT-14844\)](#)**

The profoundly incorrect assumption by the new group is that current mainstream agricultural practices are sound. This is not true. Chemical use is not needed. The only reason we don't have a purely ecological agricultural system is because of decades of corporate consolidation and market driven ideology that have left 99% of farmers with little to no market power and therefore little ability to change production methods. When farmers can barely make a living, when children of farmers want to leave, when land is being consolidated into fewer hands there are deep systemic problems.

If farmers got reasonable prices for their products and weren't drowning in debt I suspect that many, many more farmers would see environmental regulations as enhancing their production. As it stand the backdrop of the farm income crisis and the growing urban/rural divide leaves farmers caught in the middle, getting the short end of the stick and feeling set-upon.

It is not government regulations that are the enemy of farmers. It is the consolidated corporations that squeeze them at the front end and at the back end of their businesses. It's the corporations that have dug their roots deep into our 'democracy' and keep agricultural policy focussed on export, leaving farmers fighting for the lowest common denominator. It is not the 'marketplace' that is your saviour. The marketplace is rigged so that as much of farmer profit as possible flows into investor pockets.

It's time to build bridges between farmers and eaters, between urban and rural. Our issues are the same issues. Our suffering is common, our needs our common. This system is broken.

an online visitor replied on November 14, 2014 - 11:38pm [PERMALINK \(/COMMENT/14855#COMMENT-14855\)](#)

### **[BROKEN RECORD \(/COMMENT/14855#COMMENT-14855\)](#)**

Your competely non-sensical diatribe must have been copied from the CFA propaganda handbook of 1979.

an online visitor replied on November 14, 2014 - 9:59am [PERMALINK \(/COMMENT/14833#COMMENT-14833\)](#)

### **[FINALLY A GROUP WITH SOME BACKBONE! \(/COMMENT/14833#COMMENT-14833\)](#)**

Quote: A coalition of commodity groups representing Grain, Hog and Bean growers as well as the Fruit and Vegetable association.

Editor: Comment will be published in full if resubmitted and signed in accordance with our guidelines.

an online visitor replied on November 14, 2014 - 10:41am [PERMALINK \(/COMMENT/14834#COMMENT-14834\)](#)

[NEXT QUESTION \(/COMMENT/14834#COMMENT-14834\)](#)

So, where does OFA stand or sit on this?

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