

# LEADER-POST

## Guided by science

By Lyle Stewart, The Leader-Post December 27, 2014 5:01 AM

I write regarding the Dec. 8 letter, "Save our bees". Saskatchewan has a successful honey bee industry with about 100,000 colonies of bees that produce high quality honey and play a valuable role in the pollination of crops.

As was noted, Saskatchewan does not currently plan to follow Ontario in implementing restrictions on neonicotinoid pesticides. The government respects Health Canada's Pest Management Regulatory Agency's (PMRA) scientific system to evaluate, register and monitor pest control products and sees PMRA's continuing evaluation of neonicotinoid insecticides as important. Decisions must be based on sound science.

Moreover, there have been no reported incidents of neonicotinoid seed treatments affecting honey bees in Saskatchewan. Varroa mites and other diseases are the main health concerns to our beekeeping industry. When these diseases are controlled, beekeepers are very successful at maintaining healthy colonies.

This is demonstrated by winter mortality rates in Saskatchewan that were below the fiveyear average this year, despite a long, cold winter in 2013/2014. I would like to commend Saskatchewan's professional beekeepers for their work in mitigating the effects of the diseases that are the real cause of bee mortality.

The government supports important research on bee health through the Agriculture Development Fund. The province has also collaborated with industry and producers to put in place DriftWatch, an online tool that helps identify drift sensitive agricultural areas including beehives to help manage potential effects of spray operations.

We will continue our work with stakeholders to support a strong honey bee industry in Saskatchewan.

Lyle Stewart

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Stewart is Saskatchewan's minister of agriculture.

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