

# THE WESTERN PRODUCER

## College Grads Challenged To Find Community Support For Ag

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Folks involved in Canadian agriculture will likely tell you that one of the biggest challenges facing the industry today is being able to generate public and political support for the sector.

The growing divide between the farm and the consumer, combined with the internet, bloggers and myths about where food comes from, has made for a competitive information environment that can quickly influence Canadian policy debates at all levels of government.

That message recently hit home for at least one agriculture college in Ontario.

The biggest battle facing Canadian agriculture, a fresh crop of young Kemptville agriculture grads were told recently, is a fight for “political understanding and support.”

“This is the competition agriculture faces,” said Howard Mains, a former Kemptville grad who works for Tactix government relations and public affairs in Ottawa. Mains is a mainstay in Ottawa agriculture circles.

“In Ontario, rural communities and agriculture have lost their political base to the competition of well-organized, well-funded urban interests,” he said.

The ongoing battle over the use of neonicotinoid pesticides is a prime example, Mains told the graduates.

The Ontario government wants to reduce the use of the seed treatment by 80 percent by 2017, a move that has infuriated farmers and pesticide manufacturers who insist the chemicals are integral to their operations and modern agriculture.

Some 40 farmers recently gathered outside Ontario agriculture minister Jeff Leal’s office in Peterborough to protest the new regulations, which are still in draft form. The protests were organized by Grain Farmers of Ontario, a group vehemently opposed to the province’s neonicotinoid plan.

However, the general public and environmentalists blame neonics for killing bees and other pollinators. They’ve inundated premier Kathleen Wynne and her cabinet with petitions calling for the pesticides to be banned.

Those 50,000 Ontarians, who are also voters, signed petitions, Mains said, and outshouted Ontario’s farmers. They won the political debate.

“Those of us in farm and industry groups called on the government to base its decision on the weight of scientific evidence but our voices were lost to the clash of cymbals by a politically valuable constituency,” Mains said in his May 22 speech.

“Ontario agriculture and rural communities will need to rethink how they will deal with the competing demands for political understanding and support.”

Mains said agriculture's young people must "become the next generation of leaders with the objective of gaining broader community support and engagement."

It's an issue the young Kemptville grads already know well. The nearly 100-year-old agriculture college was slated to be shut down in 2015 after the University of Guelph said it would no longer front the funds to keep it open.

The college offers training in agriculture, equine care, food science, horticulture, heavy equipment, industrial welding and fabrication and is an essential part of eastern Ontario's farming community.

The province eventually stepped in with \$2 million to keep the school open for a year after more than 400 people, many of them current and future students, appeared at public meetings in Kemptville in 2014 to protest the school's closure.

More than a few at the time said the college's location was essential to ensuring their children could get an education, given many of the students returned to the farm on weekends to help keep their family's operations going.

The college had also become a dependable source of new employees for construction and heavy machinery shops and companies throughout eastern Ontario.

The funding was designed to keep things operational while the province and community leaders look for a new school partner.

That future appears to be embraced as the Kemptville Centre for Rural Advancement, a multi-faceted plan developed by a task force initiated by the community of Kemptville.

Mains said there was no doubt in his mind that the college would remain "well established and the rich tradition of education will continue on this college."

"I am confident we will gather here again in 2017 to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Kemptville Agriculture School," he said.

*Kelsey Johnson is a reporter with iPolitics, [www.ipolitics.ca](http://www.ipolitics.ca).*

## NORAHG RESPONSE

Mr Mains is ABSOLUTELY CORRECT ! And the Ontario Liberal government has GONE TOO FAR ! Overall, there is NO bee crisis in Ontario because of insecticides, and ANY prohibition is NOT necessary ! The Ontario Liberal government, and bee conspiracy terrorists, are NOT credible sources of real scientific information upon which this political decision about prohibition can be made. It is inescapable that the allegations against neonicotinoid insecticides are FALSE ! If we had less conventional neonicotinoid use in Ontario, we would still have bee colony collapse disorder, because many bee-keepers are NOT competent to manage their hives. There is NO other recourse but litigation and complaints ! CropLife Canada, Grain Farmers of Ontario, and all agricultural businesses, must sue the neonicotinoid-hating fanatics' brains out ! They must stop the proposed fanatical prohibition in Ontario, whatever the cost may be ! They must demand that the proposed prohibition be stopped, forever. <http://wp.me/p1jq40-8FZ>