



## Ontario grain group tables resolution to withdraw from OFA

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Resolution sends a powerful message to the general farm organization, says Grain Farmers' chair

photo: Mark Brock



by SUSAN MANN & BETTER FARMING STAFF

A resolution calling for Grain Farmers of Ontario to withdraw its membership in the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) was tabled at the commodity group's annual meeting Tuesday.

The fact that the resolution was proposed, discussed — and not turned down — still sends a powerful message to the general farm organization, said Mark Brock, Grain Farmers chair. The resolution originated in Perth County, the district that Brock represents.

The federation “isn’t representing the views of the grain producers in Ontario,” Brock said, Thursday. “I think the reason the resolution was brought forward was just to communicate frustration with OFA’s approach to the neonic (neonicotinoid) issue.” A growing body of scientific evidence shows that neonicotinoid insecticides are highly toxic to honeybees and other beneficial insects, a June release from the provincial ministry of environment and climate change said.

Grain Farmers and other organizations within the agricultural industry point to other research that suggests with precautions, neonics can be far safer to use than the insecticide they replaced. The insecticide is often applied as a seed treatment on corn and soybeans to protect crops from early season insect damage.

“Ultimately, most grain producers are frustrated with OFA’s position on the neonics and how they’ve handled it,” Brock said. “But they don’t want a message sent to government either, I think, that says we’re fragmented within the ag community.”

Asked what “tabling” a resolution means, Brock said, “The next time we get together as delegates we can have a motion that brings it back to the floor and we can have a discussion on it and vote on it.” The next formal meeting of Grain Farmers’ delegates is at the organization’s semi-annual meeting in March 2016.

Almost all of the corn and 60 per cent of the soybean seeds sold in Ontario are treated with neonicotinoid insecticides, the provincial ministry of environment said in the controversial June 9 press release.

That same release included quotes from the farm federation’s leader. OFA president Don McCabe has said since that his comments within the government’s release are not an endorsement of the regulations but an acknowledgement that more work was needed to develop the new rules. McCabe also said the federation planned to continue to make sure farmers’ voices are heard.

Asked about OFA’s position on neonics, McCabe said the federation and Grain Farmers have the same goal in mind. Both organizations want to lift stringent and arguably unworkable provincial rules on neonics, but the organizations are following different strategies, he said.

Grain Farmers representatives walked out of a briefing meeting with agriculture minister Jeff Leal last December; some other agricultural groups left with them. The federation remained in the meeting, along with the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association.

Brock stressed it isn't an official Grain Farmers board position to withdraw membership in the federation. "From the grassroots side of things, there's a lot of grain farmers that were frustrated with OFA being in that (government) announcement of the (neonicotinoid) regulation back in June. They feel OFA is helping government implement a regulation and trying to make it workable for farmers but the regulation isn't workable at all."

Even if the tabled resolution is eventually passed, it doesn't mean it becomes Grain Farmers policy. Brock said resolutions are recommendations to the board and it's up to directors to decide how to handle them.

Grain Farmers was formed in 2010 through an amalgamation of the corn, wheat and soybean growers' organizations. It has been a member of the federation ever since and pays a \$500 annual membership fee.



photo: Don McCabe

Federation president Don McCabe said on Thursday he hasn't officially been made aware of the resolution. "Therefore, I haven't got too much to worry about at the moment, I guess."

There are many shared individual members between OFA and GFO. The federation has 37,000 members; Grain Farmers has 28,000.

If the Grain Farmers commodity group did withdraw membership in the federation, McCabe said that's its choice. "Members come, members go, both on a group level and on an individual level."

The Ontario government's regulation on the sales and use of neonicotinoid-treated corn and soybean seeds came into effect July 1. The government wants to cut the acreage planted with the treated seeds by 80 per cent by 2017. The new rules are being phased in over two years.

Grain Farmers said the regulations are unworkable and is taking the provincial environment ministry to court the end of this month, asking that the implementation date be delayed until May 2016, after next year's crop is planted.**BF**

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