

BC Honey Producers Association Executive Meets With New Agriculture Minister Lana Popham

The B.C. Honey Producers Association central executive met with Agriculture Minister Lana Popham on Sept. 21, 2017 in Victoria to raise several areas of concern for beekeepers.

The meeting was the first opportunity for the BCHPA to brief the new minister on critical issues, including a rising concern about colony health in blueberry pollination, the desire for an improved and expanded provincial apiculture division, and how farm classification and pollination services for beekeepers are seen by some to be under attack by the B.C. Assessment Authority.

The minister is no stranger to beekeepers; in her former role as NDP opposition critic for agriculture she attended BCHPA annual general meetings and generally supported beekeepers' concerns.

Attending the meeting in the minister's office were: BCHPA President Kerry Clark, First Vice-President Jeff Lee, Canadian Honey Council Rep Stan Reist and Treasurer Irene Tiampo. Second Vice-President Rudi Peters participated by teleconference.

Also in attendance with the minister were Deputy Minister Wes Shoemaker, Assistant Deputy Minister James Mack, Provincial Apiculturist Paul van Westendorp and Ministerial Assistant Jessica Smith.

The BCHPA executive raised four high priority areas of concern, as outlined below. In all cases Minister Popham took notes and said she would consult with her staff and consider actions. She made no commitment, but expressed support and interest for the BCHPA's concerns.

The executive also expressed concern about reports that a large-scale Alberta migratory beekeeper whose hives from Ontario are quarantined in Alberta because of the presence of Small Hive Beetle, might ship those hives to the Okanagan area of B.C. for winter without provincial authorization. Minister Popham said she was aware of the situation and had been following it closely. She has also raised concerns with her Alberta counterpart. She said the issue was being dealt with by the two provinces' apiculture divisions.

The four high priority items the BCHPA raised with the minister were:

- a. **a) The BC Ministry of Agriculture Apiculture Program.** The bee industry of BC appreciates the useful work conducted by the program, and looks forward to it continuing. There are areas of the province however (e.g., north of Prince George) where significant amounts of bee stock are being produced (with plans to increase) that have had no access to Apiculture Program disease inspection

services that are required by regulation.

Action: The BCHPA requested of the minister dialogue with BCHPA and Apiculture Program Manager on ways to develop strategies to address required inspection services in under-served parts of the province.

- a. **b) Blueberry Pollination.** Beekeepers involved in blueberry pollination are becoming increasingly concerned about impacts to their colonies from fungicides and other farm practices, to the point that many are withdrawing from participation. It is not only a loss for the beekeeper but a greater loss for the blueberry industry, amounting to tens of millions of dollars in lost crops. BCHPA is engaged in discussions with Blueberry Council and have proposed collaborating with a major study (\$ 0.5 million) to partly address the issue. In the past the B.C. apiculture program would have also participated, with some key field trials or pilot projects. We feel this function is a weak link in industry maintenance and development.

Action: The BCHPA requested the Ministry of Agriculture consider instituting increased research into honey bee colony health in hives used for pollination, particularly in Fraser Valley blueberry fields.

- a. **c) Pollination service as farm income.** The BCHPA considers that there is a key inconsistency in the BC Assessment regulations regarding inclusion of pollination service income as qualifying farm income. Although apiculture is a qualifying agricultural use, beekeepers' pollination services are excluded. However, other services, such as horse stud services, are considered farm income, adding to the inconsistency. The pollination sector has become ever more important to agriculture in BC, as non-managed pollinators disappear and managed honey bees assume a greater role in enabling berry and fruit production in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

Action: The BCHPA requested discussion with responsible ministries, with the goal of including pollination income as qualifying farm income.

- a. **d) Honey bee forage as farm use.** Beekeepers involved in pollination report apparent inconsistencies and resistance from the BC Assessment Authority to recognize the value of pollination in farmland assessment. Despite recent Assessment Appeal Board rulings in favour of beekeepers the Assessment Authority has challenged this concept. An appeal of land assessment for farm purposes, explored these complex issues in a multi-day hearing. Several key principles emerged.

Action: The BCHPA requested that the Minister of Agriculture reconsider the situation and pursue with BC Assessment an interpretation document that respects the findings of the Appeal board and can be used by beekeepers and landowners to avoid the appearance of arbitrary, inconsistent decisions in future.

- Jeff Lee, with notes from Kerry Clark