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STUDY ON THE IMPORTANCE OF BEES AND BEE HEALTH IN THE PRODUCTION OF HONEY, FOOD AND SEED

Ninth Report of Agriculture and Forestry Committee and
Request for Government Response Adopted

Speech by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Thursday, May 28, 2015

THE SENATE

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[Translation]

STUDY ON THE IMPORTANCE OF BEES AND BEE HEALTH IN THE PRODUCTION OF HONEY, FOOD AND SEED

NINTH REPORT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY
COMMITTEE AND REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT
RESPONSE ADOPTED

Hon. Claudette Tardif: Honourable senators, I'm pleased to rise to speak to the motion to adopt the ninth report of the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, entitled *The Importance of Bee Health to Sustainable Food Production in Canada*. I want to thank the chair of the committee, Senator Mockler, for his leadership and his important contribution in preparing this report.

I would also like to thank the other senators who participated in this study. I especially want to acknowledge Senator Mercer who, unfortunately, could not be with us but who supported this study from the beginning.

[English]

In the last few years, bee health, or lack thereof, has become a concern worldwide. In its May 2015 issue, *National Geographic* dedicated 18 pages to the world's most important pollinators. Last week, our neighbours to the south announced new steps to promote bee health through a national strategy to promote the health of honey bees and other pollinators, as well as a pollinator research action plan.

Yesterday, it was your committee's turn to unveil nine recommendations that are designed to improve and protect bee health in Canada.

Honourable senators, as you well know, bees play an important role in the environment and food and seed production, as well as honey production in Canada.

[Translation]

Over the course of our study, which began in November 2013, we learned that honey bees are vital for the pollination of plants, fruits and vegetables. They also play an important role in the agricultural system and in the preservation of ecosystems. The pollination of canola, which is one of the most profitable crops in Canada, is also a major activity for the Canadian bee industry.

The commercial value of honey bees for crop pollination in Canada is estimated at over \$2 billion annually. Worldwide, their contribution to the human food supply is estimated at about \$200 billion U.S.

[English]

Pollinators play an important role in sustainable food production. One out of every three bites of food we eat is due to the hard work of our pollinators. Furthermore, 70 of the 100 crop species that provide 90 per cent of the world's food are pollinated by bees. Bees are essential to human nutrition.

[Translation]

Canada had over 8,700 commercial and hobbyist beekeepers in 2014, managing over 694,000 colonies. I would just like to point out that one colony can contain over 50,000 bees. Sixty-six per cent of colonies are in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. However, most beekeepers — 68 per cent — are in British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec. Forty-two per cent of Canadian honey is produced in my home province of Alberta. The value of honey production in Alberta is estimated at \$79 million. In western Canada, about 300,000 honey bee colonies are used to pollinate hybrid canola seed each year.

[English]

Honourable senators, we cannot afford to lose such a precious part of our food-production system. The lack of comparable data makes it difficult to speak of a global decline in bee health. However, other countries have observed a higher-than-normal bee mortality.

• (1600)

The mortality of bees is of major concern. Since 2006-07, annual overwinter colony losses in Canada have consistently been above the average rate of 10 to 15 per cent of colonies. The 2013-14 winter was particularly challenging for our Canadian beekeepers, where losses in Canada reached an average of 25 per cent. B.C. beekeepers lost an average of 15 per cent of their colonies, while in Ontario losses were up to 58 per cent.

[Translation]

Witnesses who appeared before our committee identified several stressors, which interact and negatively affect the health of bees, such as weather and climate change; the transportation of bees; hive management; disease and pathogens, insecticides such as neonicotinoids; and a lack of floral diversity. Many factors weaken bee health.

Canada has already introduced a number of measures in response to these concerns. However, more needs to be done to address serious problems.

The committee therefore made nine recommendations to the Government of Canada, particularly Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Health Canada and the Department of Finance. The recommendations primarily focus on improving hive management, agricultural practices and chemical registration, while increasing funding for long-term research.

[English]

Honourable colleagues, I would urge you to read this important report carried out by your committee and which illustrates the important work that the Senate carries out.

I would therefore move the adoption of this motion.

The Hon. the Speaker: Is it your pleasure, honourable senators, to adopt the motion?

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to and report adopted.)