

## **New Chair to Support Pollinator Research April 2, 2012**

The W. Garfield Weston Foundation is making a major contribution to support the future of the world's food supply with the establishment of The Rebanks Family Chair in Pollinator Conservation in the School of Environmental Sciences at the Ontario Agricultural College, University of Guelph (U of G). The endowed Chair is a Canadian first and has been made possible with a \$3 million gift and in the name of Wendy Rebanks, daughter of Garfield Weston and Director of The W. Garfield Weston Foundation.

“The shortage of honey bees and other pollinators is a serious threat to plants, the food chain and to our economies,” said U of G president Alastair Summerlee. “This investment will support critical research and education that is a vital part of the University's efforts to build a better planet. We thank The W. Garfield Weston Foundation for their vision and generosity.”

Worldwide, about 300 cultivated crops are used for food, fodder and fibre production, worth an estimated \$200 billion-plus a year. About 80 per cent of those plants rely on pollinators — mainly honeybees — to set seeds and fruit.

Both the diversity and the numbers of insect pollinators are falling globally because of such factors as disease, pesticide exposure, malnutrition, habitat loss and climate change. In Canada, 28 species of butterflies and moths and two bee species are known to be at risk. In the United States, honeybee populations have declined 30 per cent in the past 20 years.

The Rebanks Family Chair in Pollinator Conservation at U of G will develop a world-class research program, raise awareness of the importance and plight of pollinators, inform public policy, help train highly qualified conservationists and agriculturalists, and assist amateur beekeepers.

“For three generations, The W. Garfield Weston Foundation has maintained a family tradition of helping charitable organizations to make a difference and enhance the quality of life for all Canadians,” said Chairman, W. Galen Weston. “We are excited to partner with the University of Guelph on this important initiative that goes beyond pure research to engaging all stakeholders in this critical effort.”

The University will conduct an international search for a proven educator, researcher and advocate of pollinator conservation. The chair will undertake broad consultation beyond the University to create an expert advisory group, guide curriculum and contribute to undergraduate and graduate education.

Established in 1874, OAC is Canada's oldest and most comprehensive institution for teaching, research and extension service in food, agriculture, the environment and rural communities. This includes North America's largest research and teaching apiary, several research farms and world-renowned experts in honey bee health and management