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Opinion / Editorials

Give bees a reprieve: Editorial

With half of the bees in Ontario hives dying over the winter, the provincial government needs to take action to protect these valuable pollinators.



CARLOS OSORIO / TORONTO STAR [Order this photo](#)

Ontario bee farmers are convinced that neonicotinoid pesticides are killing bees.

Published on Sun Jun 29 2014

Bees are in peril.

The Ontario Beekeepers' Association says half the bees in the province's 100,000 hives died over the winter, marking an incredible loss of the industrious insects that pollinate most of our food, flowers and plants.

Powerful pesticides are now widely considered to be the overarching cause of the bee deaths and last week [another study](#), this time from a panel of 50 international scientists, verified that conclusion. The Task Force on Systemic Pesticides did a comprehensive review on the effects of neonicotinoid pesticides and found unequivocal evidence that they are killing bees.

It's another powerful call for government action to save the bees.

After all, they play a huge role in Canada's agricultural industry, pollinating roughly \$2 billion worth of fruit and vegetables every year.

Unfortunately, Health Canada has said its [review](#) of the pesticides will go on for several years so environmental groups like the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment are pushing for provincial bans. The stakes are enormous.

And in Ontario, the news is somewhat heartening. It appears the Liberal government might be persuaded to take some action, although it's leery of a full ban. During the spring campaign, the government promised the beekeepers' association that it would limit the use of neonics to certain areas and would ensure that untreated seeds are

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within six weeks of the June 12 election date. The clock is ticking.

As the [association's](#) Tibor Szabo says, "Something has to be done. The industry is failing fast."

While farmers say they rely on pesticides to grow plentiful crops, the task force scientists say that at least one study, from Italy, shows that bans actually improve the yield. The European Union has imposed a two-year moratorium on their use to study the damage posed by the pesticides.

What's clear, is that there is widespread agreement that the pesticides are killing bees. With that in mind, Ontario's freshly appointed agriculture minister, Jeff Leal, must put bees at the top of his file.

No doubt, Leal will meet opposition, particularly from the powerful agricultural pest control industry, but the reality is that once the only reliable pollinators have gone, the farmers — and their crops — will suffer. We need bees.

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