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Comment: An outright ban on neonicotinoids would be reckless and costly

Posted 2 days ago by [Lorne Hepworth](#) in [Comment](#), [News & Opinion](#), [Opinion](#)

Regions that use no neonicotinoids are experiencing major bee losses while others that make widespread use of the treatment have healthy, thriving bee populations

Bee health has been the subject of much media attention over the last year — and rightly so. Bees are a critical part of the agricultural system and largely responsible for one in every three bites of food we eat.

There are few who are more concerned about this issue than the manufacturers of pest control products who depend heavily on bees to pollinate the crops their products are designed to protect. Quite simply put, we as an industry absolutely need bees in order to thrive.

But to focus the conversation about bee deaths solely on pesticides means losing an opportunity to address bee health in

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Here's what we know: International researchers widely agree that bee health is impacted by a combination of factors, the primary one being the Varroa mite. In Western Canada, more than 20 million acres of canola, the majority of which is treated with a neonicotinoid, is planted and bee health remains strong. And canola, unlike corn, is a crop that bees feed heavily on.

If we look at the rest of the world, there are regions that use no neonicotinoids that are experiencing major bee losses, while others that make widespread use of these tools have healthy, thriving bee populations. For example, in Australia where farmers rely heavily on neonicotinoids, bee populations are flourishing. It is also worth noting there are not any Varroa mites in Australia.

Groups like the Sierra Club — with no known expertise in bee health or agriculture — have been recklessly calling for a ban on neonicotinoids, saying they are to blame for bee population declines. While isolated incidents of bee mortalities certainly need to be addressed, the reality is that managed honeybee colony numbers in this country have been on the rise for the last 20 years, according to Statistics Canada.

A ban on neonicotinoids wouldn't solve bee health issues but it would threaten the economic viability of our farmers by removing an important tool from their tool boxes. Without neonicotinoids farmers would be forced to return to older technologies, lose more of their crop to insect damage, and maybe be unable to grow certain crops altogether. One only need look at research from the University of Guelph that shows infestations of wireworms and European chafer grubs in corn crops can cause a three- to 20-bushel-per-acre yield loss to see the potential consequences of not having access to neonicotinoids. This means someone who farms 500 acres could see a reduction in their revenues of \$65,000 a year.

The benefit of insecticide-treated seeds is that the insecticide is applied directly to the seed, which is then planted in the ground. This limits not only the quantity of pesticides used but also the potential exposure of non-target organisms, such as bees, to the



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insecticide.

Neonicotinoid seed treatments have been used in Canada for a decade with very few incidents. The plant science industry has invested heavily in research and development to limit any potential exposure of bees to dust from treated seeds.

We as an industry have also reached out in an effort to work together to find long-term solutions to bee health issues. Through these partnerships we've been able to develop and widely distribute a comprehensive set of best management practices for planting insecticide-treated corn. While we're making significant progress by working with grower groups, governments, as well as the Canadian Honey Council, there are others who refuse to join the larger dialogue around this issue.

Everyone in the agricultural value chain has an interest in bee health. We'd be all much better served by working together and taking a holistic, science-based approach to addressing bee health challenges that will enable the agricultural system as a whole to thrive.

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