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## Concerned About Bees and Bee Health?

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“Approximately three-quarters of all plant species — including at least 90 agricultural crops — require insects, birds or bats for pollination. Healthy pollinator populations are necessary for food security and for ecosystem integrity,” states an article in the May/June, 2013,

edition of the National Farmers Union (NFU) publication, Union Farmer Newsletter.

Pollinators are already adversely affected by habitat loss, introduced diseases and climate change, but recently, headlines have been about neonicotinoids (neonics, for short), a pesticide that has been linked to bee deaths.

In July, the Canadian Association of Professional Apiculturalists reported that 58% of bee colonies in Ontario did not survive last winter. The average for Canada was 25% with Ontario’s losses the highest and Alberta the lowest at 18.5%. Many beekeepers and a growing number of bee researchers believe the neonics are weakening bees, making them more vulnerable to viruses, parasites and loss of food supply.

In Ontario, seed pre-treated with neonics are used on almost 100% of the corn and canola acres, 80% of the soybean acres and 35% of the wheat acres. Meanwhile crop researchers estimate the treatment is needed on only 10 to 20% of corn and soybean acreages.

The European Union suspended the use of three neonic insecticides for two years, beginning December 1, 2013.

In July, 2014, Jeff Leal, Ontario’s Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, announced plans to restrict the use of neonicotinoids. The province will require farmers and other commercial growers to apply for permits to plant seeds treated with neonics. The ministry plans to hold meetings with farmers, beekeepers and pesticide makers, aiming to have a licensing system ready for the 2015 planting season.

The Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry held hearings from December, 2013 to May, 2014, on the importance of bees and bee health on the production of honey, food

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and seed. In its submission to the Senate, May 1, 2014, the NFU recommended a five year moratorium on the use of neonicotinoid seed treatments on field crops in Canada.

The NFU recommended a limited permit system for farmers who can prove their crops will be threatened by pests, and that the treatments be sold separately from the seed, with the costs of the seed and the treatment listed separately.

The NFU also recommended the federal government research and widely promote alternative and ecological practices that do not depend on the use of chemical pesticides, and undertake publicly funded research on various pest control agents, including non-chemical ones, as well as monitor pollinator population counts before and after the moratorium is implemented.

The Ontario Beekeepers' Association also called for a moratorium on neonics in May, 2014. From its position statement, posted at [www.ontariobee.com/neonics](http://www.ontariobee.com/neonics): "...to break the cycle of overuse and to protect the health of bees, our ecosystems and the viability of Ontario's beekeeping industry, the OBA calls on the Government of Ontario to enact an immediate moratorium on the sale of neonicotinoid treated seeds on field crops in Ontario."

The full NFU submission to the Senate hearings is at [www.nfu.ca/story/importance-bees-and-bee-health](http://www.nfu.ca/story/importance-bees-and-bee-health)

Information on creating pollinator friendly spaces is at [www.pollinationcanada.ca](http://www.pollinationcanada.ca)

Contact your MP and MPP to express your support for research and the reduction of pesticide use.

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