MONTREAL GAZETTE

Letter: In defence of using neonics

SPECIAL TO MONTREAL GAZETTE

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A worker Cincinnati, checks honey bee hives for queen activity.

John Minchillo / AP

Re: "Protecting the pollinators" (Opinion, May 29)

Readers should know that neonics, or neonicotinoids, are among the safest insecticides available. As neonics are applied directly to the seed, the amount used is considerably less than what is used when farmers have to spray an entire field. Because the seed is planted directly into the ground, beneficial insects, like bees, are less exposed to the product.

Bee health is impacted by a number of factors, including disease, weather, nutrition, habitat, genetic diversity, pesticides and beekeeping practices. Meaningful solutions to bee health challenges require a holistic approach. Focusing exclusively on any one element will do little to improve the overall health of bees.

Just last month, the Obama administration's Pollinator Health Task Force — after a comprehensive consultation process on pollinator health, which included hearing from hundreds of witnesses with many different perspectives and receiving input from almost 20 different federal agencies and

departments — released its report on a comprehensive approach to improving bee health.

Neither the U.S. Pollinator Health Task Force nor Health Canada have recommended restricting the use of neonicotinoids, one of the safest and most effective pest control tools ever developed. Their conclusions were very much in line with what the National Bee Health Roundtable and the federal regulatory agency here in Canada have to say.

In addition, the recently released Canadian Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry report on bee health highlights the complexity of the issue and the numerous factors that combine to affect bee populations. The report also highlights the value of and need for collaborative efforts among the government, beekeepers and agricultural stakeholders on bee health.

Just as we need bees, farmers need tools like neonics to provide us with safe, high-quality foods while ensuring our environment is protected for future generations.

The fact of the matter is that neonics have become a convenient scapegoat even though scientific evidence simply doesn't support the sensationalism. Naming pesticides as the main culprit in pollinator health issues steers us away from finding any meaningful solutions to improve pollinator health.

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