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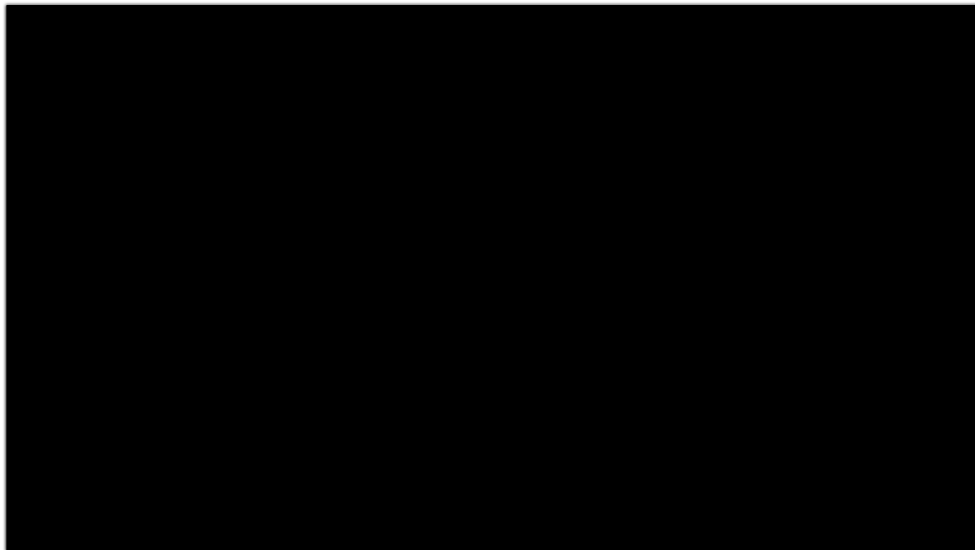
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Fewer bees or just more Bee-S?

Posted on July 15, 2014 by admin



In today's *New York Times*, Mark Winston [writes](#) a heart-wrenching column about a problem that will sooner or later come back to sting all of us in a big way—massive die-offs of bees.

There are (at least) three problems, though, with his piece:

1. Winston provides no data to support his claim about the "bee colony collapse" that we have been hearing about.
2. This is because there is no such collapse.
3. This does not stop him from writing about it.

Here are a few of Winston's comments and the ACSH rebuttal:

MW: "But in the midst of crisis can come learning. Honeybee collapse has much to teach us about how humans can avoid a similar fate."

ACSH: The real lesson here is that scientific claims without data aren't worth a ball of wax.

MW: "Honeybee collapse has been particularly vexing because there is no one cause, but rather a thousand little cuts."

ACSH: So why is he focusing on pesticides?

MW: "A typical honeybee colony contains residue from more than 120 pesticides. Alone, each represents a benign dose. But together they form a toxic soup of chemicals whose interplay can substantially reduce the effectiveness of bees' immune systems."

ACSH: Where is the evidence to support this? And why do *Times*' writers love the nonsense term "toxic soup of chemicals?"

MW: "The only human equivalent is research into pharmaceutical interactions, with many prescription drugs showing harmful or fatal side effects when used together, particularly in patients who already are disease-compromised."

ACSH: Yes—some drugs are dangerous when used together. This is why there is a huge database on drug-drug interactions, which is based on real science. This analogy stinks.

MW: "We must demand that our regulatory authorities require studies on how exposure to low dosages of combined chemicals may affect human health before approving compounds."

ACSH: Now we are entering cuckoo land. There are so many problems with the statement, that it is difficult to know where to begin. First, this statement is a thinly disguised version of the "toxic soup" myth—that tiny amounts of chemicals in our bodies both persist (wrong) and combine to do extra harm (also wrong) by (not) persisting in our bodies. And he wants the FDA to require all new drugs to be evaluated not only on their merits, but along with X thousand chemicals that "may" alter the safety of the new drug? Here are some stats. New drugs now: 14 years and \$1-2 billion to develop and bring a new drug to market. New drugs using Winston's advice: None. Ever again.

Since Winston presented no evidence to support his claim, we figured that we should.

Myth One: Colony Collapse Syndrome in the US:

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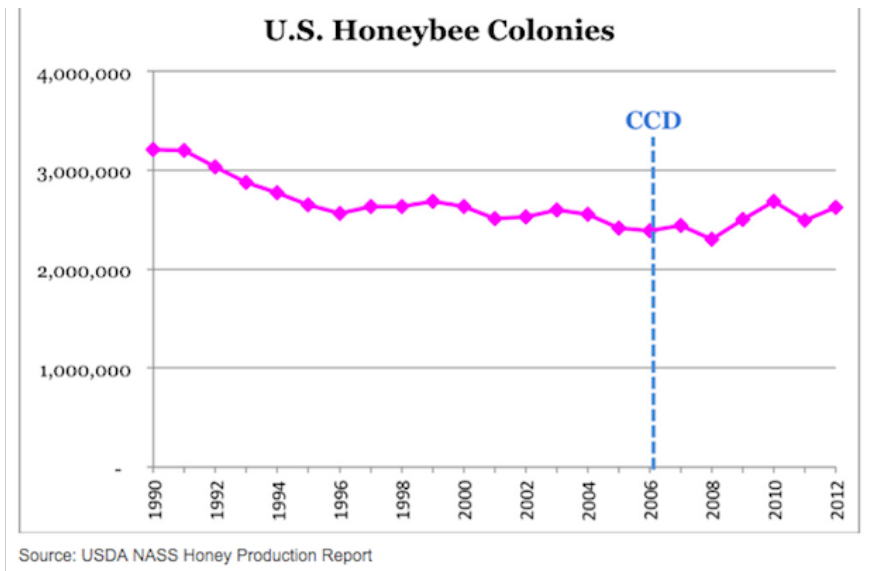
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Guess what? There isn't one. That is unless you believe that the USDA's report on honeybee colonies is incorrect, in which case we would love to know about it.

Myth #2: Canada's bee population is also threatened

This would seem to be just as false:

Estimates	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
	Year-to-date (averages)				
Beekeepers ³	7,028	7,403	7,713 ^f	8,312	8,483
Colonies ³	592,120	620,291	637,920 ^f	690,037	672,094
Production of honey, total (pounds x 1,000) ⁴	70,362	81,672 ^f	79,824 ^f	90,759	75,488
Value of honey, total (dollars x 1,000) ⁵	126,253	144,197 ^f	150,691 ^f	176,206	176,153



(Source: [Statistics Canada](#))

Make no mistake—*no one*—here or otherwise—wants bees endangered. They are hugely important in many ways, most notably by pollinating a good chunk of our agricultural output. But when people start spouting unsupported theories, all this does is point research in the wrong direction, and this can do substantial harm on its own by causing ill-informed policies to be implemented.

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