

# A rebuttal on the five facts

*Dear editor:*

*Re: Five facts about neonicotinoids, the Ontario Farmer, Nov. 5*

The plant science industry agrees that pollinator health is a complicated issue with no one specific solution. I'd like to provide some additional facts for consideration about neonicotinoids.

**Fact one:** Bee health is a complex issue that is impacted by a combination of factors

Bee health is an important issue that deserves our attention. International researchers and beekeepers around the world widely agree that bee health is impacted by a combination of factors, the primary one being the Varroa mite. However, the complexity of the issues facing bee health is, unfortunately, too frequently being overlooked in favour of an unjustifiable focus on pesticides. As such, with the singular focus of some groups on neonicotinoids, an important opportunity is being missed to take a long, hard look at all potential sources of bee health problems.

**Fact two:** Pollinator numbers have increased

Numbers about pollinator populations need to be put into context. The reality is that, according to Statistics Canada data, the number of managed honey bee colonies across Canada, including in Ontario, has increased. Since the early 2000s, when neonicotinoids were first introduced, the number of honey bees has increased to near-record levels. In 2012 over 700,000 honey bee colonies were reported Canada-wide, up from 600,000 in 2000. This trend is mirrored in both Quebec and Ontario. Additionally, overwintering losses fluctuate – for example as Dan Davidson reported the 2012/13 winter losses amounted to 37.9% of colonies, but in 2011/12 the overwintering losses were 12 percent – which doesn't support the idea that losses are increasing due to neonicotinoids.

**Fact three:** Seed treatments are not just used in Ontario

In Western Canada, close to 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. Over 70 per cent of Canada's bee colonies reside in this region.

**Fact four:** Banning neonicotinoids is not the answer

The vast majority of Canada's approximately 7,600 beekeepers have not reported short or long-term effects on their bees as a result of neonicotinoids. Globally, there are regions that use no neonicotinoids experiencing major bee losses while other regions that make widespread use of these tools have healthy, thriving bee populations.

For example, in Australia where farmers rely on neonicotinoids, bee populations are flourishing.

**Fact five:** Neonicotinoid seed treatments offer significant advantages

Neonicotinoid seed treatments are applied directly to the seed, thus limiting any exposure to non-target organisms while providing valuable protection to the crop. Neonicotinoids currently on the market have been thoroughly assessed by Health Canada to ensure they can be used safely without harming bees.

Unfortunately, the letter submitted by the Ontario Beekeepers Association follows the pattern with some of their members continuing to point blame at one sole cause instead of taking a holistic view of the challenges facing bee populations.

The plant science industry agrees that research into various challenges threatening pollinator health is absolutely necessary and time would be better spent focusing our efforts on working collaboratively to find meaningful, long-term solutions to bee health challenges that will ensure a productive and sustainable agricultural system.

**Lorne Hepworth**  
*President, CropLife Canada*