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Letter to the editor: Guelph Mercury Tribune

Dear editor,

Publishing in a city that houses the Ontario Agricultural College and countless farm organizations, it is disappointing that your article, “The sting of neonics on pollinators” (August 9) did not delve deeper into what local farmers and the agricultural community are doing to protect bee health or why farmers might use neonic insecticides as one of the many ways they protect food crops. The article also ignored how the introduction of this technology has helped farmers to reduce/eliminate usage of older pesticides more damaging to pollinators and riskier to farmers who use them.

Pests are called pests for a reason – because they can destroy crops. Together with other methods of crop protection and good management, pesticides have helped farmers grow more and better-quality fruits, vegetables and field crops. Being able to protect plants against pests and diseases reduces the risk of crop failures, improves the quality and quantity of food available and has helped keep food prices affordable with Canada having some of the lowest food costs in the world.

Bee health is of vital importance to Ontario farmers who rely on healthy bees to help pollinate their fruits, vegetables and other crops. Farmers often plant cover crops to provide bees with natural food sources; they take mandatory pesticide safety courses so that they know how and when to use crop protection tools and have installed dust shields on planters to keep the spread of neonic dust contained to minimize the risk to exposure.

Experts around the world continue to examine the many factors that can impact bee colony health and mortality. For example, beekeepers lose some of their bees each winter to cold temperatures, inadequate nutrition and the length of the

winter. Another key factor has been a parasitic mite called Varroa destructor which has been devastating to Canadian bee colonies.

In Europe, where activist pressure has led to near-total bans on neonic usage, farmers have reverted to use of older pesticides, sometimes with several applications per year, while still experiencing crop losses. There is no evidence that bee health has improved in Europe with the bans; many experts consider other factors such as bee pests and diseases to be much more important.

For reasons such as these, Canada and Ontario continue to allow the use of neonics for crop protection using carefully regulated procedures - even in Prince Edward County, notwithstanding the article's claim to the contrary.

Farmers want to be part of the solution and are always looking for ways to improve their farming practices. To learn more about bee health and other food and farming topics of interest to Canadian consumers, visit

www.RealDirtonFarming.ca

Sincerely,

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