

# Be a Minnesota Pollinator Champion



Minnesota has one of the largest networks of pollinator advocates in the country. And this year, state policymakers have a chance to help turn the tide for pollinator health.

Eighty-seven percent of Minnesotans agree that pollinator declines in our state are a huge concern.<sup>1</sup> In the 2016–2017 season, Minnesota beekeepers reported losing more than 50 percent of their bees,<sup>2</sup> and in addition to managed honey bee losses, many of Minnesota's 400 species of native bees are also in decline. One of our most common bumble bees, the Rusty Patched Bumble Bee, was placed on the Endangered Species List this year.<sup>3</sup> With many Minnesota counties already lacking sufficient native pollinators to support the crops in those areas,<sup>4</sup> we can't afford for this problem to get worse.

Why are bees and other pollinators in trouble? Scientists agree: multiple interacting factors are contributing to declining populations, including pesticides, habitat loss, diseases and parasites.<sup>5</sup>

## Bees support healthy farms

Pollinators are critical to the state's agricultural economy. Key crops grown in the state—like melons, cucumbers, squash, strawberries, tomatoes and berries—rely on bees and other pollinators to flourish. Pollination is also essential for Minnesota's top fruit crop, apples, which were valued at \$15.2 million in 2016.<sup>6</sup>

Minnesota has also historically been one of the top five honey-producing states in the country. In 2017, honey production contributed \$14.5 million towards the

state's agricultural economy.<sup>7</sup> However, due in large part to bee losses in recent years, Minnesota honey production is falling.

## Neonic seed coatings: Harmful and unnecessary

Neonicotinoid insecticides, or neonics, are one of the most widely used insecticides in the country and they pose a clear threat to pollinator health. Research suggests that chronic exposure to neonicotinoids can impact the learning, foraging, immune health and overall hive fitness of pollinators.<sup>8</sup>

- **Nearly all of the corn seeds, and at least a third of soybeans** planted nationwide have been pre-coated with these bee-harming pesticides.<sup>9</sup>
- In 2014, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) found that for soybeans, **“neonicotinoid seed treatments likely provide \$0 in benefits to growers.”**<sup>10</sup>
- For corn and soybeans, research shows that **neonicotinoid seed coatings fail to consistently increase yield** or farmer profits, especially in climates like Minnesota's.<sup>11</sup>
- Farmers report that while neonic-free seeds are available, **they can be very hard to find.**



## What does a pollinator-friendly policymaker look like?

There's no cookie-cutter approach to pollinator protection in Minnesota. Pollinator action will vary based on the needs of your district, the advocacy efforts happening on the ground, and a changing political landscape. A pollinator-friendly candidate in Minnesota will support policy that impacts their district and its pollinator needs. This could include any number of the following measures, which come with support from experts across the state:

- Meaningfully reduce the bee-harming pesticides that flood the market
- Track and reduce the use of neonicotinoid-treated seeds
- Provide economic and other support to farmers and beekeepers impacted by pollinator loss
- Stop funding cuts for pollinator projects and support fundraising through the state budget
- Create pollinator habitat programs to make up for widespread habitat losses
- Improve pollinator education across the state
- Support incentives for farmers to transition to regenerative practices in food production

This list isn't exhaustive, and the specific needs of pollinators in each region should be considered. Minnesota

has one of the largest networks of pollinator advocates in the country, with 37 pollinator-friendly municipalities in the state. The strong advocacy groups in communities across Minnesota are ready to move forward on both state and local levels.

### Join the movement

- As a first step, make your values known! We encourage you to announce that you're friendly to pollinators. Post about it on social media or your website, or use it as a conversation-starter when meeting with constituents.
- Pollinator-friendly policymakers will make it a priority to meet with pollinator advocates, beekeepers, and farmers regularly throughout their time in office. An initial meeting with your district's pollinator experts is a great learning opportunity—they can help you define your own commitment to pollinators and lay out a policy plan.
- Finally, consider joining our contact list of pollinator-friendly policymakers. By joining this list, you can stay up-to-date on what other pollinator champions are up to in Minnesota, and easily connect with pollinator advocates in your district.

To sign up, set up a meeting or learn more, contact Willa Childress at [willa@panna.org](mailto:willa@panna.org) or (612) 254-9222.

We hope to celebrate with you our shared commitment to a healthy food system.

### Notes

- 1 Minnesota Environmental Partnership. "Minnesota Voters' Environmental Priorities in 2017." (2017)
- 2 Preliminary results: 2017-2018 Total and Average Honey Bee Colony Losses by State and the District of Columbia (2018), available at <https://beeinformed.org/2018/06/21/preliminary-results-2017-2018-total-and-average-honey-bee-colony-losses-by-state-and-the-district-of-columbia/>
- 3 Michael Greshko. "First US Bumblebee Officially Listed as Endangered." *National Geographic*. (2017)
- 4 Insu Koh, Eric V. Lonsdorf, Neal M. Williams, Claire Brittain, Rufus Isaacs, Jason Gibbs, and Taylor H. Ricketts. "Modeling the status, trends, and impacts of wild bee abundance in the United State." *PNAS* 2016 113: 140-145.
- 5 Goulson, D., et al. "Bee Declines Driven by Combined Stress from Parasites, Pesticides, and Lack of Flowers." *Science* 347, no. 6229 (March 27, 2015): 1255957-1255957. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1255957>.
- 6 USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (2016), available at [https://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics\\_by\\_State/Minnesota/Publications/Agri-View/index.php](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/Minnesota/Publications/Agri-View/index.php);
- 7 USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (2018), available at [https://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics\\_by\\_State/Minnesota/Publications/Agri-View/index.php](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/Minnesota/Publications/Agri-View/index.php)
- 8 Goulson, D., et al. "Bee Declines Driven by Combined Stress from Parasites, Pesticides, and Lack of Flowers." *Science* 347, no. 6229 (March 27, 2015): 1255957-1255957. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1255957>.
- 9 Stokstad, E. 2013. How big a role should neonicotinoids play in food security? *Science*, 340: 675.
- 10 Center for Food Safety, "Heavy Costs: Weighing the Value of Neonicotinoid Insecticides in Agriculture." 2014.
- 11 Gurian-Sherman, D. Alternatives to Neonicotinoid Insecticide-Coated Corn Seed: Agroecological Methods Are Better for Farmers and The Environment. (2017). Center for Food Safety.

At Pesticide Action Network North America, we work to create a just, thriving food system. PAN works with those on the frontlines to tackle the pesticide problem — and reclaim the future of food and farming. [www.panna.org](http://www.panna.org) • [www.honeybeehaven.org](http://www.honeybeehaven.org) • 510.788.9020