

**WHITE HOUSE  
ESTABLISHES POLLINATOR HEALTH TASK FORCE  
TO ADDRESS COLONY COLLAPSE DISORDER**

by

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The White House announced the Obama administration is creating a federal task force to promote the health of honey bees and other pollinators. The task force will look at the expanding, but still largely mysterious, epidemic of Colony Collapse Disorder as well as various issues causing a decline in bee population. The ultimate goal of the task force is to help expand the habitat for bees and other pollinators such as butterflies.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Environmental Protection Agency will lead a task force that will include representatives from at least 15 other federal agencies and foundations to examine the problems that have plagued bees and other pollinators in recent years. A copy of President Obama's memorandum establishing the Pollinator Health Task Force, is accessible online [here](#).

In announcing the task force, The White House emphasized that pollinators are vital to fruit, vegetable and nut production. They add \$15 billion to the value of agricultural crops every year in the U.S. Bees alone are vital to growing at least 90 commercial crops grown in North America.

However, commercial bee keepers have seen an average of 30% losses in their hives each winter going back to 2006. These historically high losses, attributed to Colony Collapse Disorder, are affecting a wide range of agricultural crops.

The task force will develop a national pollinator health strategy and action plan to understand and counteract the loss of pollinators, with a goal of rebuilding the populations of such insects. USDA and the Department of Interior have been directed to unveil detailed plans for best practices on federal lands within the next 90 days. Those plans likely will include identifying methods for fostering pollinator-friendly plants. Plans authorized by the Obama administration also include growing more forage for pollinators on federal lands or along road right-of-ways to develop safe, pesticide-free habitats for honey bees.

The pollinator initiative also will be integrated into USDA conservation programs. Towards that end, the White House announced an \$8 million USDA initiative to increase forage and pollinator habitat on federal lands in the Conservation Reserve Program. Additionally, the USDA will work with land-grant extension services and other agencies to expand native crop mixes that support and promote healthy pollinators.

Because pesticides are suspected as contributing to Colony Collapse Disorder, the presidential task force will examine best practices to reduce pollinator exposure to pesticides. President Obama has directed the EPA to examine the effects of pesticides, including neonicotinoids, on pollinators and report back to the task force within six months on the findings. Neonicotinoids are directly applied to some plants and used as a seed treatment on crops such as corn. The neonicotinoid class of insecticides is considered less toxic in general than other types of insecticides, although ongoing research suggests they can be toxic to pollinators (Europe, effectively banned neonicotinoid pesticides in 2013).