

[Independent Study Finds Bees Thrive Away From Cropland](#)

(*Beyond Pesticides*, November 16, 2007) A Pennsylvania beekeeper, John McDonald, has undertaken a study of agriculture's effect on [colony collapse disorder](#) (CCD) of honeybees. After writing an article for the *The San Francisco Chronicle* that speculates on genetically modified (GM) crops' contribution to the phenomenon, McDonald spent the last six months producing evidence to support his theory (one of many regarding the causes of CCD).

In his original article, McDonald asks, "Is it not possible that while there is no lethal effect directly to the new bees [from GM crops], there might be some sublethal effect, such as immune suppression, acting as a slow killer? . . . Given that nearly every bite of food that we eat has a pollinator, the seriousness of this emerging problem could dwarf all previous food disruptions."

While CCD has been a worldwide concern, there has been minimal research in determining pesticides' role, particularly regarding proximity to cropland. McDonald writes, "When it appeared that others weren't interested in this experiment, I undertook to do my own investigation at my own expense." Beginning in May, McDonald established new colonies (as his had been wiped out earlier), one in Centre County, Pennsylvania, where farming is extensive, and one adjoining Allegheny National Forest, where agriculture lay outside of the bees' foraging range. The eight hives were monitored from May to October, and all had free access to goldenrod with which to produce honey.

By mid-October, the hives adjacent to farmland consistently did not gain weight, while those away from it grew steadily. When the "supers," where honey is collected, were checked, the former had not produced enough honey to feed themselves, while the latter had produced close to 350 pounds of honey.

McDonald will leave the colonies in place to see if these bees die off like his last, but hopes "These results should encourage new research to determine what factor or factors are present in farm country to cause such a discrepancy in honey production."

Sources: *San Francisco Chronicle*: [March 10, 2007](#) and [November 10, 2007](#)

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