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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

More than 50 billion honeybees have died during the past three years. To understand the importance of honeybees consider that every third bite on your plate is a result of their primary role on the planet as pollinators. Honey to a bee is what electricity is for humans – energy.

Honeybees contribute at least \$44 billion a year to the U.S. economy including cotton and medicines. Many blue-chip corporations depend on them for their products including General Mills, Haagen Dazs, Starbucks and Burt's Bees.

Bees have a memory, and are being trained to count and help people as an early detectors of disease by sniffing skin and lung cancers, diabetes and tuberculosis.

A combination of factors has collided--responsible for memory and appetite loss and autoimmune system collapse -- resulting in the rapid decline in honeybee populations worldwide.

Each year 5 billion pounds of pesticides are applied globally. (In 2008 researchers from Penn State found 43 different pesticides in one single Pennsylvania apple orchard.)

Fortunately, there is hope on the horizon as organics is the America's fastest growing sector at \$24 billion a year.

Each of us can help by purchasing organic foods and cottons, plus supporting local beekeepers by buying honey. Do not use herbicides or pesticides in your yard, plant a wide variety of native yellow and blue flowers, and participate by helping scientists in the U.S. National Phenology Network (www.usanpn.org).

Without these bees we can't survive.

Dr. Reese Halter is a conservation biologist at Cal Lutheran University and author of *The Incomparable Honeybee and the Economics of Pollination*.