



Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association

Common Ground Country Fair

**Testimony In Support of LD 1105
An Act To Protect Populations of Bees and Other Pollinators
April 16, 2015**

Good afternoon Senator Edgecomb, Representative Hickman and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. My name is Heather Spalding and I'm the Deputy Director of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA). Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

MOFGA has nearly 11,000 members and our family members are committed to MOFGA's mission. Our families love what MOFGA does, the organic farmers who grow their food and they want to protect all Maine children from exposure to pesticides.

In the last five years 30% of the national bee population has disappeared and nearly a third of all bee colonies in the U.S. have perished. The estimated monetary loss is \$30 billion a year. Bees are having a rough go of it, to be certain. Many factors conspire to take out these beautiful, diverse and essential components of our ecological web. Generally, scientists focus on bee diseases, mites, nutrition, hive management, increasingly climate change, and, of course, pesticides.

A growing body of scientific evidence links neonicotinoid pesticides with the alarming decline of bee populations. In addition to killing bees outright, research has shown that even low levels of these dangerous pesticides impair bees' ability to learn, to find their way back to the hive, to collect food, to produce new queens, and to mount an effective immune response. Neonics are "systemic" pesticides, which means that the chemicals move inside plants. Generally, plant roots absorb the chemicals and then the chemicals move throughout the entire plant. Neonics are very efficient tools for many conventional farmers, landscapers and gardeners because any pest that feeds on any part of the plant will be exposed to the toxin. The poison also flows through to the pollen and nectar and is toxic to bees and other important pollinators.

Neonics brought to market with great fanfare as a safer alternatives to chemicals such as organophosphates, neurotoxins that, still, are widely used in Maine agriculture.

Yet more than 50,000 bumblebees were killed in Wilsonville last June when a landscaping company applied Safari (a systemic neonicotinoid insecticide) to blooming linden trees. This was one dramatic case illustrating the need for public policy to protect pollinators.

Some governments are taking decisive action. 15 countries in Europe have imposed a two-year restriction on the use of several of these chemicals stating that neonics pose an unacceptably high risk to bees. And the Obama Administration is on the verge of announcing its plans to protect bees. MOFGA, along with researchers, farmers, gardeners, environmental organizations, policy makers and concerned citizens across the country are urging the Obama Administration not to lose sight of the adverse impact of bee-toxic pesticides.

Last year MOFGA collaborated with organizations across the US and Canada to compile the important consumer report Gardeners Beware, which showed that 36 out of 71 (51 percent) of garden plant samples purchased at top garden retailers in 18 cities in the United States and Canada

294 Crosby Brook Road, P. O. Box 170, Unity, Maine 04988 • **Phone:** (207) 568-4142
Fax: (207) 568-4141 • **Email:** mofga@mofga.org • **Web:** www.mofga.org

contain neonicotinoid (neonic) pesticides. Some of the flowers contained neonic levels high enough to kill bees outright assuming comparable concentrations are present in the flowers' pollen and nectar. 40% of the positive samples contained two or more neonics. MOFGA purchased poppies and English daisies from Home Depot in Augusta, and scabiosa (a.k.a. pincushion flower) and coreopsis from Lowes, also in Augusta. All but the poppies tested positive for neonicotinoids.

While it is true that retailers are taking notice of consumer concern, the chemicals are almost ubiquitous in the conventional landscaping and nursery industry. Yes, Home Depot has mandated an extra tag to indicate that plants have been treated with neonics. And yes, Lowe's has announced that it will phase out the use of neonics entirely. But the industry is far greater than those two big box establishments.

And, like so many other ecological challenges we face today, we're not going to shop our way out of this one. We really need everyone to choose organic in the marketplace. We also need everyone to organize for responsible public policies that protect our pollinators.

LD 1105 will be an important step toward protecting pollinators and assuring consumers that they are not purchasing plants pre-poisoned with chemicals toxic to pollinators.

Thank you very much for your consideration.