

February 22, 2016

John Venhuizen, CEO
Ace Hardware
2200 Kensington Ct
Oak Brook, IL 60523

Dear Mr. Venhuizen,

On behalf of Friends of the Earth and a growing number of environmental, beekeeper, farmworker and consumer groups representing millions of members and supporters, we are writing to follow up on our August 2014, June 2015, and September 9 letters with Ace Hardware regarding its sale of products and plants that contain bee-toxic neonicotinoid pesticides.

We urge Ace Hardware to strengthen its stated willingness to protecting bees and other pollinators and nursery workers by immediately making a full fledged, time bound commitment to stop selling all off-the-shelf products and plants that contain neonicotinoid pesticides, while transitioning to least-toxic alternatives that are benign to human health and the environment, by December 2016.

In August 2013, Friends of the Earth, Pesticide Research Institute and allies released *Gardeners Beware: Bee-toxic pesticides found in "bee-friendly" plants sold at garden centers nationwide*, and sent letters asking top retailers to stop selling neonicotinoids and plants pre-treated with these pesticides. Our first-of-its-kind pilot study and a [follow-up study](#) released in June 2014 found that more than half of the garden plants purchased at major retailers in cities across the United States and Canada contained neonicotinoid pesticides at levels that have the potential to harm or kill bees.

In the past year, thousands of your company's customers have signed petitions and made calls to Ace stores requesting your company take important steps to protect pollinators and the planet. Several days before we delivered more than 400,000 petition signatures to Ace Hardware's corporate headquarters from customers across the country urging Ace Hardware to make this shift, Ace Hardware issued a new statement conveying its willingness to move away from using these products by 2019. However, Ace Hardware has not made clear time-bound public commitments with a timeline or benchmarks stating how it will phase-out products and plants that contain these chemicals, nor agreed to a meeting with our organization to discuss this issue as its competitors have done.

As a top company dedicated to meeting growing consumer demand for environmentally friendly garden products, removing bee-toxic pesticides from Ace store shelves would demonstrate your company's sustainability leadership and ensure that home gardeners across the country can trust Ace as a provider of *truly* "bee-friendly" plants and products. In the meantime, our growing coalition is educating and activating the public to take action on this issue because we are all extremely concerned about Ace's failure to address our concerns.

Since your company made its latest statement, Home Depot, the world's largest home-improvement chain, announced that it has removed neonicotinoid pesticides from 80 percent of its flowering plants to date and that it will complete its phase-out in plants by 2018. This announcement follows an ongoing campaign by Friends of the Earth and allies urging Home Depot to stop selling plants and products treated with neonicotinoids.

Additionally, Lowe's, the second largest home improvement retailer in the country, agreed to eliminate neonicotinoid pesticides on all plants and off-the-shelf products by spring 2019, redoubling pesticide management efforts with the addition of an application reduction plan with plant suppliers including encouraging growers to use biological control programs, increased focus on consumer education initiatives, increase funding of pollinator gardens and include disclosure of these efforts in its Corporate Social Responsibility Report.

Ace Hardware stores in states including Washington, Oregon, Minnesota, Maine and Illinois have already committed to eliminate these pesticides from their stores on plants and off the shelf products — so it is clearly possible for this shift to occur across your company.

Given that a growing number of Ace Hardware's own stores and competitors as well as plant wholesalers and nurseries have already made public commitments to phase out the use of neonics, Ace Hardware's continued delays in making clear time-bound company-wide public commitments makes us wonder if Ace is giving more weight to pesticide industry interests than to the concerns of your company's customers and the strong body of independent science demonstrating that neonicotinoids are harmful to bees.

According to *Greenhouse Grower's 2016 State Of The Industry Survey*, in which 255 growers responded, a large number of growers are eliminating the use of neonicotinoids in production this year (64% overall), led mostly by small growers (69%), followed by large growers (57%) and medium-sized growers (56%). Based on Home Depot's latest announcement, this number is likely significantly higher and leads us to question why Ace Hardware is unwilling to make a commitment that would allow the company to align itself with the rest of the industry. We believe waiting until 2019 is too long to wait to eliminate these products and we urge Ace Hardware to go further than its competitors and eliminate these products by December 2016.

Due to the changing market and availability for plants and products that do not contain neonicotinoid pesticides, this week thousands of your company's customers are pledging to not shop at Ace Hardware until it makes a clear time-bound public commitment like its competitors to eliminate these pesticides in plants and products from store shelves.

As a top company dedicated to meeting growing consumer demand for environmentally friendly garden products, we urge Ace Hardware to make a public commitment to the following:

- **Completely phase out use of neonicotinoids in all plants and off-the-shelf products, while transitioning to least-toxic alternatives that are benign to human health and the environment and encourage growers to use alternative methods such as biological controls by December 2016;**
- **Offer third-party certified organic starts and plants; and**
- **Educate customers on why your company has decided to take these steps to protect bees and other pollinators.**

Such actions would demonstrate Ace Hardware's commitment to sustainability and protecting declining bee populations upon which our food supply and healthy ecosystems depend. We believe Ace's customers would react positively, given the concern in the public for the plight of bees and farmworkers and the growing demand for sustainable and organic gardening products.

We ask that Ace Hardware respond to our letter and request for the above commitments and set-up a meeting to discuss these commitments by March 8, 2016. Please contact Tiffany Finck-Haynes, Food and Technology Program at Friends of the Earth (beeaction@foe.org or 202-222-0715) if you have questions.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Lisa Archer
Director, Food and Technology Program
Friends of the Earth-U.S.

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Cottingham Farm LLC
Eastern Shore Food Hub Corp.

Cynthia Palmer
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