

September 9, 2015

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

Dear Mr. Venhuizen,

On behalf of our millions of members and supporters, our growing coalition of environmental and consumer groups across the U.S. are writing to follow-up on our August 2014 and June 2015 letters urging Ace Hardware commit to not sell products containing pesticides harmful to bees, butterflies, birds and other wildlife, which includes pesticide products containing systemic neonicotinoid pesticides, as well as garden plants treated with these chemicals, and clarify the public statement Ace made in May that, “it is willing to move away from products containing neonicotinoids.”

In the few months since we last wrote, thousands of your customers have sent letters, made calls and visited Ace Hardware stores requesting your company take important steps to protect pollinators and the planet, but thus far Ace has only conveyed its willingness to move away from using these products and has not made any public commitments with a timeline or benchmarks to phase-out products and plants that contain these chemicals. As a top company dedicated to meeting growing consumer demand for environmentally friendly garden products, removing bee-harming pesticides from your shelves would demonstrate Ace’s sustainability leadership and ensure that home gardeners across the country can trust your store as a provider of *truly* “bee-friendly” plants and products.

In response to Ace’s continued delay in taking these important steps to protect pollinators, our growing coalition is educating and activating the public to take action on this issue. Over the month of August, our coalition and thousands of your customers across the U.S. held “brunches for bees” and educated their communities about the plants and products Ace carries that contain bee-harming pesticides. Your customers signed letters and visited your stores to urge Ace to stop the sale of neonicotinoid pre-treated plants and off-the-shelf pesticide products. A sampling of pictures of the brunches your customers held can be viewed here: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/brunchforbees>

While your customers visited your stores urging you to listen to mounting consumer demand and the growing body of science indicating it is essential your company act fast, a number of studies have recently emerged, which further demonstrate why Ace Hardware should take immediate action. In August, the European Food and Safety Administration, an agency of the European Union, released its findings from research analyzing the impacts three neonicotinoid pesticides have on pollinators when applied in foliar sprays. EFSA found “high risks” for pollinators, from honey bees to solitary bees, from these sprays, matching earlier research into neonicotinoids applied in granules and seed treatments.¹

A study from York, England-based Food and Environment Research Agency examined neonicotinoid seed treatments applied to rapeseed crops in England, from 2000 to 2010. Over that time period, the authors found an increased mortality rate for honey bee colonies, correlating with higher numbers of acreage treated with imidacloprid, a common neonicotinoid. Imidacloprid use jumped from just 1 percent of rapeseed crops to 75 percent in those ten years.²

¹ European Food Safety Authority. 2015. Press release. Neonicotinoids: foliar spray uses confirmed as a risk to bees. August 26, 2015. <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/press/news/150826>

² Budge, G.E. *et al.* Evidence for pollinator cost and farming benefits of neonicotinoid seed coatings on oilseed rape. *Sci. Rep.* **5**, 12574; doi: 10.1038/srep12574 (2015).

Further, the U.S. Geological Survey conducted a national-scale investigation in 25 state and territories of neonicotinoid contamination in stream ecosystems. The agency tested for six distinct neonicotinoid pesticides, and found evidence of at least one type in more than half of urban and agricultural streams tested.³ This study reinforces a broad-scale investigation the U.S. Geological Survey conducted in 2014, which found alarming contamination levels of neonicotinoids in regional waterways throughout the Midwest exceeding known chronic and in some cases, acute toxicity levels for aquatic insects and other animal life critical to healthy ecosystems.⁴

As we've shared with you in past, Ace's failure thus far to publicly commit to a timeline to phase-out pollinator-toxic pesticides is in stark contrast to the actions of many of its competitors. The garden industry is shifting away from using these insecticides. According to a recent survey by *Greenhouse Grower* magazine, more than two-thirds of plant nurseries have either stopped using neonicotinoids or has started moving away from using these chemicals.⁵ In addition, [more than thirty nurseries](#), landscaping companies and garden centers, including the two largest home improvement retailers in the world, Home Depot and Lowe's, as well as BJ's Wholesale Club and Whole Foods Market, have taken steps to eliminate neonicotinoids from their stores and operations.

A growing number of more than twenty cities, states, universities and federal agencies have also taken steps to eliminate these pesticides. The Environmental Protection Agency has placed a moratorium on new or expanded uses of these pesticides and proposed a new rule that limits the use of some bee-harming pesticides to create temporary pesticide-free zones when honey bee colonies are contracted for pollination.

On behalf of our millions of members and supporters, we urge Ace Hardware to listen to a growing body of science and join these industry and government leaders in signaling its dedication to sustainability and pollinator health by making this same commitment.

Our coalition is asking retailers to take action to help protect bees and other pollinators by committing to the following:

- **Do not sell off-the-shelf neonicotinoid insecticides for home garden use.**
- **Demand neonicotinoid-free vegetable and bedding plants from nursery suppliers and do not sell plants pre-treated with these pesticides.**
- **Offer third-party certified organic starts and plants.**
- **Educate your customers on why your company has made the decision to protect bees and other pollinators.**

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

Please contact Tiffany Finck-Haynes, Food and Technology Program at Friends of the Earth (beeaction@foe.org or 202-222-0715) by September 30 so that we may discuss your company's current policies and how your company can show its leadership in corporate sustainability by committing to not sell products associated with pollinator decline.

³ Hladik, Michelle, Kolpin, Dana. 2015. First national-scale reconnaissance of neonicotinoid insecticides in streams across the USA. *Environmental Chemistry*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1071/EN15061>.

⁴ Hladik, Michelle, Kolpin, Dana, Kuivila, Kathryn. 2014. Widespread occurrence of neonicotinoid insecticides in streams in a high corn and soybean producing region, USA. *Environmental Pollution*. Volume 193, 189-196. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S02697491144002802>

⁵ Greenhouse Grower. 2015. Greenhouse Grower's 2015 Top 100 Growers Whitepaper. *Greenhouse Grower Magazine*. May 20th, 2015. Available: <http://www.greenhousegrower.com/business-management/download-greenhouse-growers-2015-top-100-growerswhitepaper/>

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We hope to begin work with you immediately to protect the small but important creatures upon which so much of our food and ecosystems depend and we hope to be able to highlight your company as an industry leader.

Sincerely,

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

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Katherine Paul
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