

June 17, 2015

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

Dear Mr. Venhuizen,

On behalf of the millions of members and supporters of our growing coalition of environmental, consumer and worker groups across the U.S. and Canada, we are writing to follow up on Ace's recent public statement that it is willing to move away from products containing neonicotinoids. **We are pleased that Ace is listening to customer concerns and we urge Ace to commit to not sell products containing pesticides harmful to bees, butterflies, birds and other wildlife. This includes pesticide products containing systemic neonicotinoid pesticides, as well as garden plants treated with these chemicals.**

In the past several months, thousands of your customers have signed petitions and made calls to Ace 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 and bird-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 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.

As shared with you previously, Friends of the Earth's study, *Gardeners Beware 2014: Bee-Toxic Pesticides Found in "Bee-Friendly" Plants Sold at Garden Centers across the U.S. and Canada* (which can be found at www.foe.org/beeaction) shows that 51 percent of "bee-friendly" garden plants purchased at Lowe's, Home Depot and Walmart in 18 cities across the United States and Canada contain neonicotinoid pesticides at levels that have the potential to harm or even kill bees.

The Pesticide Research Institute and Friends of the Earth recently released a new report, *Growing Bee Friendly Garden Plants: Profiles In Innovation* (which can also be found at www.foe.org/beeaction), which provides examples of wholesale nurseries, retailers and institutions that are responding to consumer demand and successfully phasing out use of pollinator-toxic pesticides from their operations, implementing innovative new pest management approaches to avoid regrettable substitutions, and moving toward practices that are healthy for bees and the environment. The report shares strategies and resources for other businesses to follow the lead of these industry leaders.

This report reinforces a recent finding by Green House Grower magazine, which found 31% of the 100 largest greenhouse growers in the industry have completely stopped using neonicotinoids and another 38% of these growers have stopped using neonicotinoids on some of their plants.¹ These changes are taking place due in part to the growing number of retailers shifting their purchasing policies and in part to the more than 90 percent of households that want to manage their lawns and gardens in an

¹ 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/>

environmentally friendly way,² by choosing eco-friendly products over those with toxic chemicals, such as all-natural repellents and organic soils. There is clearly a growing demand for safe, environmentally friendly alternatives and for organic growing methods that are benign to human health and the environment and as recent studies demonstrate, wholesale nurseries and garden retailers are finding it possible to offer products to meet this change in demand.

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. In the past year, in the face of mounting evidence and growing consumer demand, more than twenty wholesale nurseries, landscaping companies and retailers have taken steps to eliminate bee-harming pesticides from their stores, including the two largest home improvement retailers in the world, Home Depot³ and Lowe's⁴, along with Whole Foods⁵ and BJ's Wholesale Club.⁶

Retailers and other businesses are not the only actors recognizing that it is imperative to act quickly to protect pollinators. In June 2014, President Obama established a Pollinator Health Task Force to develop a National Pollinator Health Strategy, calling on EPA to assess the effect of pesticides, including neonicotinoids, on bees and other pollinators.⁷ In May 2015, the Task Force released its report, which aims at taking a number of steps to reverse pollinator declines.⁸ In April, the EPA announced that it would be unlikely to approve new or expanded uses of neonicotinoids while it evaluates the risks posed to pollinators.⁹

In addition to retailers, more than twenty states, cities, counties, universities and federal agencies have passed measures that minimize or eliminate the use of neonicotinoids including Seattle, Wash.;¹⁰ Portland, Ore.;¹¹ Boulder, Colo.;¹² Warren County, N.C.;¹³ and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.¹⁴ The

² National Gardening Association, "Garden Market Research: How Many Organic Gardeners Are There?" <http://www.gardenresearch.com/index.php?q=show&id=2896>. Accessed 4/1/2013.

³ Gillam, Carey. 2014. U.S. retailers look to limit pesticides to help honeybees. Reuters. June 25, 2014. Available: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/06/25/us-usa-agriculture-bees-idUSKBN0F02M120140625>

⁴ Lowe's. 2015. 2014 Social Responsibility Report. Available: http://responsibility.lowes.com/2015/wp-content/uploads/Lowes_2014_SR.pdf

⁵ Whole Foods Market. 2014. What is the Purpose of Responsibly Grown? Available: <http://www.wholefoodsmarket.com/responsibly-grown/purpose-why-it-matters>

⁶ Williams, Scott. Letter to Friends of the Earth. June 25, 2014. http://www.foe.org/system/storage/877/ba/5/4725/BJs_neonic_commitment.pdf

⁷ The White House. 2014. Presidential Memorandum -- Creating a Federal Strategy to Promote the Health of Honey Bees and Other Pollinators. June 20, 2014. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/06/20/presidential-memorandum-creating-federal-strategy-promote-health-honey-b>

⁸ The White House. 2015. National Strategy to Promote the Health of Honey Bees and Other Pollinators. May 19, 2015. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ostp/Pollinator%20Health%20Strategy%202015.pdf>

⁹ Environmental Protection Agency. 2015. April 2015 Letter to Registrants Announcing New Process for Handling New Registrations of Neonicotinoids. April 2, 2015. Available: <http://www2.epa.gov/pollinator-protection/april-2015-letter-registrants-announcing-new-process-handling-new>

¹⁰ Geranios, Nicholas. 2014. Spokane bans chemical that may kill bees. Seattle Times. July 4, 2014. Available: <http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/spokane-bans-chemical-that-may-kill-bees/>

¹¹ Then, Andrew. Portland bans use of insecticides believed to be harmful to bees on city property. Oregon Live. Available: http://www.oregonlive.com/portland/index.ssf/2015/04/portland_bans_use_of_specific.html#incart_river

¹² City of Boulder. 2015. Resolution No 1159. <https://www-static.bouldercolorado.gov/docs/resolution-concerning-use-neonicotinoid-pesticides-boulder-1-201504101408.pdf>

¹³ Dunlap-Kearney, Angelena. 2015. Warren County Board of Commissioners. April 6, 2015. A Resolution Proclaiming The Month of September 2015 As "Natural Resources Appreciation Month: A Celebration of Pollinators Our Heroes."

Council on Environmental Quality issued guidance for federal facilities and federal lands which included acquiring seeds and plants from nurseries that do not treat these items with systemic insecticides.¹⁵

State and city governments and federal agencies are taking these steps because pollinators are dying at alarming rates. This past year beekeepers lost 42 percent of their colonies, which is the second highest annual loss recorded to date.¹⁶ The science is clear: neonicotinoid insecticides are a leading driver of bee declines and are harming many other important and beneficial organisms essential for natural pest control and sustainable food production, including birds, bats, butterflies, dragonflies, lacewings, ladybugs, earthworms, small mammals, amphibians, aquatic insects and soil microbes — putting food production and the environment in jeopardy.^{17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26} A global body of twenty-nine independent scientists (the Task Force on Systemic Pesticides) reviewed more than 1,121 peer-reviewed studies and called for immediate regulatory action to restrict neonicotinoids.²⁷ A Newcastle University study recently found that bees might actually be addicted to these pesticides and concluded that reducing pesticide use “may be the only certain way” to halt bee and pollinator decline.²⁸

On behalf of our millions of members and supporters across the U.S. and Canada, we urge Ace 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.

¹⁴ United States Department of Interior. U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. 2014. Use of Agricultural Practices in Wildlife Management in the National Wildlife Refuge System. July 17, 2014. http://www.centerforfoodsafety.org/files/guidelines-for-interim-use-and-phase-out-of-neonicotinoid-insecticides-in-refuge-farming-for-wildlife-programs-signed-kf-7914_67415.pdf

¹⁵ Council on Environmental Quality. 2014. Supporting the Health of Honey Bees and Other Pollinators. October 2014. https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/supporting_the_health_of_honey_bees_and_other_pollinators.pdf

¹⁶ Bee Informed Partnership. Colony Loss 2014-2015: Preliminary Results. <http://beeinformed.org/2015/05/colony-loss-2014-2015-preliminary-results/>

¹⁷ Mullin CA, Frazier M, Frazier JL, Ashcraft S, Simonds R, vanEngelsdorp D, et al. 2010. High Levels of Miticides and Agrochemicals in North American Apiaries: Implications for Honey Bee Health. F. Marion-Polled. PLoS ONE 5:e9754; doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0009754.

¹⁸ Hallmann CA, Foppen RPB, vanTurnhout CAM, deKroon H, Jongejans E. 2014. Declines in Insectivorous Birds Are Associated with High Neonicotinoid Concentrations. Nature. 9 July 2014. doi:10.1038/nature13531

¹⁹ Lu C, Warchol KM, Callahan RA. 2014. Sub-lethal exposure to neonicotinoids impaired honey bees winterization before proceeding to colony collapse disorder. Bulletin of Insectology 67: 125–130

²⁰ Krischik VA. Non-Target Effects of Imidacloprid on Beneficial Insects. University of Minnesota CUES: Center for Urban Ecology and Sustainability website (last modified March 6, 2013). <http://www.entomology.umn.edu/cues/non-target/index.html>

²¹ Krischik, V. A., A. Landmark, and G. Heimpel. 2007. Soil-applied imidacloprid is translocated to nectar and kills nectar-feeding *Anagrus pseudo cocci* (Girault) (Hymenoptera: Encyrtidae) Environ. Entomol. 36(5): 1238-1245.

²² Mineau P, Palmer C. 2013. The Impact of the Nation’s Most Widely Used Insecticides on Birds. American Bird Conservancy. http://www.abcbirds.org/abcprograms/policy/toxins/Neonic_FINAL.pdf

²³ Goulson D. 2013. Review: An overview of the environmental risks posed by neonicotinoid insecticides. Journal of Applied Ecology 50: 977–987; doi: 10.1111/1365-2664.12111

²⁴ R Mason, H A Tennekes, F Sánchez-Bayo, P U Epsen (2013) Immune suppression by neonicotinoid insecticides at the root of global wildlife declines J Environ Immunol Toxicol 1: 1. 3-12

²⁵ Xerces. 2013. Scientists Call for an End to Cosmetic Insecticide Use After the Largest Bumble Bee Poisoning on Record. The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation. <http://www.xerces.org/2013/06/27/scientists-call-for-an-end-to-cosmetic-insecticide-use-after-the-largest-bumble-bee-poisoning-on-record>

²⁶ Hopwood, J, S. Hoffman Black, M. Vaughan, and E. Lee-Mader. 2013. Beyond the Birds and the Bees: Effects of Neonicotinoid Insecticides on Agriculturally Important Beneficial Invertebrates. http://www.xerces.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/XercesSociety_CBCneonics_sep2013.pdf

²⁷ Gibbons D, Morrissey C, Mineau P. 2014. A review of the direct and indirect effects of neonicotinoids and fipronil on vertebrate wildlife. Springer Berlin Heidelberg. doi: 10.1007/s11356-014-3180-5

²⁸ Kessler, S, Tiedeken E, Simcock K, Derveau S, Mitchell J, Softley S, Stout J, Wright G. 2015. Bees prefer foods containing neonicotinoid pesticides. Nature. 7 May 2015. doi:10.1038/nature14414

Our coalition urges Ace 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, birds and other pollinators.**

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

Many of our organizations will promote all companies that make this commitment and make public their policy to protect bee health by not purchasing or selling neonicotinoid plant treatments or neonic-treated plants. These companies will be highlighted on our website, in social media, and in the press so consumers can see for themselves where companies stand on protecting bees before they go shopping for their gardening supplies. You can view a current list of retailers that have committed to not use or sell neonicotinoids at www.foe.org/retailers

Please contact Tiffany Finck-Haynes, Food and Technology Program at Friends of the Earth (beeaction@foe.org or 202-222-0715) by June 30th 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 declines.

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

Lori Ann Burd
Environmental Health Director
Center for Biological Diversity

Wenonah Hauter
Executive Director
Food & Water Watch

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