

April 27, 2015

First Lady Michelle Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mrs. Obama,

The undersigned organizations, on behalf of our millions of members, would like to extend our gratitude for your leadership and work to create a healthy and affordable food system for all Americans. We appreciate that you recognize that this is a critical issue and that you are striving to set an example for the entire country by planting the White House Kitchen Garden and adding a pollinator garden and honeybee hives to the presidential grounds.

While we are grateful that you have helped bring the need for healthy food into the national spotlight, we urge you to listen to the hundreds of thousands of Americans calling on you to create a truly safe-haven for bees, butterflies, birds and other pollinators. We request that you set an example to the nation by publicly committing to ensure the White House gardens and grounds are free of pesticides linked to declining bee populations and use your position as First Lady to encourage the Administration and Congress to take meaningful actions to protect pollinators.

Bees and other pollinators are essential to a healthy food system and a healthy environment. Bees and other pollinators are responsible for one in three bites of food we eat, including many of the healthy, nutritious and delicious foods you and the “Let’s Move” campaign are encouraging children to consume more of, from apples to cucumbers to tomatoes.

However, the health of bees and other pollinators are in great peril and populations are dwindling worldwide. In the past eight years, beekeepers on average have lost 30% of their hives and some beekeepers have lost 100% of their operations. A growing body of science has implicated pesticides, including the fastest growing class of insecticides in the world, neonicotinoids, as a leading driver in bee declines, putting the health of our children, families, including the farmworker families that work in the fields and orchards, communities and environment at risk.

New studies emerge every week pointing to pesticides as a key driver in pollinator and ecosystem declines. Just last week, two new studies released in the journal *Nature* from New Castle University and a set of Swedish researchers provided new evidence that neonicotinoid insecticides can have negative impacts on bee health. These studies demonstrate that bees may actually seek out these bee-toxic pesticides that clear science demonstrates can kill bees outright or weaken them and make them more susceptible to other stressors.<sup>1,2,3,4</sup> The New Castle University study authors concluded that reducing pesticide use “may be the only certain” way to halt bee and pollinator decline.

This recommendation is very similar to that made by the Task Force on Systemic Pesticides, a global body of independent scientists that released a meta-study which reviewed more than 1,212 peer

reviewed papers published in the last five years, including industry-sponsored studies, and found that neonicotinoids are a leading factor of bee declines and are harming birds, earthworms, butterflies and other wildlife. The Task Force called for immediate regulatory action. Additionally, we have concerns on the impact these pesticides have on the health of the agricultural workers that are being exposed and the implications for public health.

The Obama administration has begun to acknowledge the strong and growing body of science pointing to pesticide use as a leading driver in bee declines. This month, the EPA announced a moratorium on new or expanded uses of neonicotinoids while it evaluates the risks posed to pollinators. However, in order to truly protect pollinators, the EPA must act on all current uses of neonicotinoids on the market, as well as other systemic insecticides that are toxic to pollinators such as flupyradifurone and sulfoxaflor.

In October, the Council on Environmental Quality released guidance that recommends federal landscapes not use systemic insecticides on plants or landscapes to help provide safe and healthy pollinator habitat. We believe this guidance should inform your actions in making the White House gardens and grounds safe for bees and other pollinators.

Due to insufficient action thus far by federal agencies and Congress, a number of U.S. cities, states, agencies, universities and other institutions have taken steps to restrict neonicotinoids. In addition, more than twenty nurseries, garden centers and landscaping companies, including the two largest home improvement stores in the world, Home Depot and Lowe's, are taking steps to eliminate neonicotinoids from their supply chains. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced in July 2014 it will phase-out the use of neonicotinoids on all national wildlife refuge lands by 2016.

While the Obama Administration has made some progress on this issue, there are still a number of steps that must be taken in order to achieve healthy pollinator populations for the sake of our food supply, economy and environment. As an advocate for healthy children, healthy families and healthy communities, your leadership on this issue is imperative. The threats to bees, birds, butterflies and other pollinators are direct threats to the sustainable food system our country, and especially our children and future generations, need to be healthy.

For the sake of our food supply, protection for farmworkers, the health of our families and the health of our planet, we urge you to listen to the more than 200,000 Americans that have asked you to take a stand for the bees, the birds, butterflies and other pollinators, along with the more than 4 million Americans that have written to the Obama Administration asking for meaningful action to restrict bee-toxic pesticides.

We urge you to follow the aforementioned guidelines outlined of the Council on Environmental Quality by publicly pledging to eliminate systemic insecticides from the White House gardens and grounds, including not sourcing plants pre-treated with these pesticides. We also request that you urge the Obama Administration to support meaningful protections for the pollinators essential to a food system that is affordable and healthy for all Americans.

Sincerely,

American Bird Conservancy

Beyond Pesticides

Butterfly Brigade of Greenbelt, Maryland

Californians for Alternatives to Toxics

Center for Food Safety

Earthjustice

Environment America

Environment Arizona

Environment California

Environment Colorado

Environment Connecticut

Environment Florida

Environment Georgia

Environment Illinois

Environment Iowa

Environment Maine

Environment Maryland

Environment Massachusetts

Environment Michigan

Environment Minnesota

Environment Missouri

Environment Montana

Environment Nevada

Environment New Hampshire  
Environment New Jersey  
Environment New Mexico  
Environment New York  
Environment North Carolina  
Environment Ohio  
Environment Oregon  
Environment Rhode Island  
Environment Texas  
Environment Virginia  
Environment Washington  
Farmworker Association of Florida  
Food and Water Watch  
Friends of the Earth  
Global Bees  
Green America  
Maryland Ornithological Society  
Maryland Pesticide Network  
Mercola.com  
Montgomery Countryside Alliance  
Organic Consumers Association  
Penn Environment  
People and Pollinators Action Network  
Pesticide Action Network North America  
The Olympia Beekeepers Association

Toxics Action Center

Toxic Free North Carolina

Wisconsin Environment

Cc:

Barack Obama, President

Gina McCarthy, EPA Administrator

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell

Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid

Speaker of the House John Boehner

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi

Jonathan B. Jarvis, Director National Park Service

---

<sup>1</sup> Williamson SM, Wright GA. 2013. Exposure to multiple cholinergic pesticides impairs olfactory learning and memory in honeybees. *Journal of Experimental Biology* 216: 1799–1807; doi:10.1242/jeb.083931 15

<sup>2</sup> Henry M, Beguin M, Requier F, Rollin O, Odoux J-F, Aupinel P, et al. 2012. A Common Pesticide Decreases Foraging Success and Survival in Honey Bees. *Science* 336: 348–350; doi:10.1126/science.1215039 16

<sup>3</sup> Whitehorn PR, O'Connor S, Wackers FL, Goulson D. 2012. Neonicotinoid Pesticide Reduces Bumble Bee Colony Growth and Queen Production. *Science* 336: 351–352; doi:10.1126/science.1215025 17

<sup>4</sup> Pettis JS, Lichtenberg EM, Andree M, Stitzinger J, Rose R, vanEngelsdorp D. 2013. Crop Pollination Exposes Honey Bees to Pesticides Which Alters Their Susceptibility to the Gut Pathogen *Nosema ceranae*. *PLoS ONE* 8:e70182; doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0070182.