

June 17, 2015

John Hartmann, CEO
True Value
8600 W Bryn Mawr Ave
Chicago, IL 60631

Dear Mr. Hartmann,

On behalf of our millions of members and supporters, the undersigned organizations are writing to follow-up on our previous letter to invite True Value to protect bees and other pollinators essential to our food supply and the environment by committing to not sell products containing pesticides linked to the global decline in pollinator populations. This includes pesticide products containing systemic neonicotinoid insecticides, as well as nursery bedding and vegetable plants treated with these chemicals.

As a top company dedicated to meeting growing consumer demand for environmentally friendly garden products, making this commitment would demonstrate True Value's sustainability leadership and ensure that home gardeners across the country can trust your company as a provider of *truly* "bee-friendly" plants and garden products.

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.

Some of these pre-treated plants and off-the-shelf neonicotinoid products may be available for sale on the shelves of your company's stores. Because there is no clear labeling to indicate the presence of neonicotinoids in nursery plants, your customers may unknowingly purchase pre-treated "bee-friendly" plants with the intent of providing habitat for bees and other pollinators, but end up causing them harm. *Obviously, this situation does not benefit pollinators, consumers, or, ultimately, your customers' trust in you as a retailer.*

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 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 is possible to offer products to meet this change in demand.

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 Depot and Lowe'sⁱⁱⁱ, along with Whole Foods^{iv} and BJ's Wholesale Club.^v

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.^{vi} In May 2015, the Task Force released its report, which aims at taking a number of steps to reverse pollinator declines.^{vii} 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.^{viii}

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.,^{ix} Portland, Ore.,^x Boulder, Colo.,^{xi} Warren County, N.C.,^{xii} and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.^{xiii} The 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.^{xiv}

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.^{xv} This is alarming given that bees are essential to the production of one out of every three bites of food that we eat.^{xvi, xvii} 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.^{xviii, xix, xx, xxi, xxii, xxiii, xxiv, xxv, xxvi, xxvii} 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.^{xxviii} A Newcastle University study recently found that bees might actually be addicted to these pesticides and concluded reducing pesticide use “may be the only certain way” to halt bee and pollinator decline.^{xxix}

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

The following groups urge True Value 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.**
- **Require neonicotinoid-free vegetable and bedding plants from suppliers and do not sell plants or plant starter mixes pre-treated with these insecticides.**
- **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 True Value's commitment to sustainability and to protecting the declining bee and bird populations upon which our food supply and flowering plants 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.

Many of our groups 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 neonicotinoid-treated plants. These companies will be highlighted on our website, in social media, and in the press so consumers can see for themselves where a company stands 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) 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. We would also be happy to answer any questions you might have or provide further information on this topic.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to working with you to protect the small but important creatures upon which so much of our food and plant life depends and we hope to be able to highlight your company as an industry leader.

Sincerely,

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Director, Food and Technology Program
Friends of the Earth

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Environmental Health Director
Center for Biological Diversity

Wenonah Hauter
Executive Director
Food & Water Watch

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Chris Phelps
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Environment New Mexico

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Pollinator Campaign Director
Center for Food Safety

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