

February 23, 2016

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

Dear Mr. Hartmann,

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 June 2015 and September 9 letters to True Value regarding its sale of products and plants that contain bee-toxic neonicotinoid pesticides.

**We urge True Value 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 True Value stores requesting your company take important steps to protect pollinators and the planet. In November, we delivered more than 400,000 petition signatures to True Value's corporate headquarters from customers across the country urging True Value to make this shift. To date, True Value has only said it is willing to move away from using these products by 2019. However, True Value has not made clear time-bound public commitments with a timeline or benchmarks to 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 and bird-harming pesticides from your shelves would demonstrate your company's sustainability leadership and ensure that home gardeners across the country can trust True Value 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 True Value's failure to address our concerns.

Since your company made its statement, Home Depot, the world's largest home-improvement chain, announced that it has removed neonicotinoid pesticides from 80 percent of its flowering plants 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 treated with neonicotinoids and remove neonic pesticides from store shelves.

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.

True Value stores in states including Washington, Oregon, Minnesota 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 True Value's own stores and competitors as well as plant wholesalers and nurseries have already made public commitments to phase out the use of neonics, True Value's continued delays in making clear time-bound company-wide public makes us wonder if True Value is giving more weight to pesticide industry interests than your 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 True Value 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 True Value 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 True Value 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 True Value 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 True Value's commitment to sustainability and protecting declining bee populations upon which our food supply and healthy ecosystems depend. We believe 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 True Value 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](mailto: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.

Cleo P. Braver  
Cottingham Farm LLC  
Eastern Shore Food Hub Corp.

Cynthia Palmer  
Director, Pesticides Science and Regulation  
American Bird Conservancy

Melissa Sargent  
Environmental Health Educator  
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