

Neonic testimony for House Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, February 17, 2022

My name is Marie Audet, from Blue Spruce Farm and Audet's Cow power located on Rte 22A, in Bridport, VT. We are raising our 4th generation—a total of 21 family members and growing—which provides plenty of motivation to care for our land, care for our animals, and preserve our farm for future generations. We grow 1400 acres of corn and 2600 acres of hay to feed our 1500 registered milking cows and the same number of youngstock.

I'm going to do my best to connect the dots to illustrate how this piece of technology fits in to our close loop system.

We in agriculture are constantly upping our game to meet the myriad of challenges we face. Our investments during the past several years have been in our in our fields, with our crops, focusing on protecting and improving our soils through more gentle, regenerative agricultural practices. Organic matter has a profound influence on soil properties and structure; it is measurable and serves as an indicator in improving soil health. Healthy soils are more resistant to major rain events, and by nature sequester more carbon.

In lieu of more traditional equipment you would have seen 5-8 years ago on our farm, today you will find

- No till corn planters
- No till drill to plant our seeds
- A DAF (Dissolved Air Flotation) system that separates 70 -75% of P from our digested manure, allowing more precise application of P.
- Manure injectors putting nutrients in the ground.
- A vertical tillage tool, top few inches: fill in cracks

- Floating tires to protect soil structure

We are all in—in protecting our farmland and ensuring a future with food security for our region at a time when other parts of the country that we currently depend on for food is drying up.

So how and why are neonics important to us?

These same regenerative practices, no till, minimum till, and cover crops actually INCREASE risk of higher insect pressure on our plantings. Sequestering carbon in soil attracts insects.

Conventional tillage helps to disturb and bury insects at greater depth and lowers the risk. We are obviously not going back to conventional tillage any more than we want to go back and spray entire fields.

Our Integrated Pest Management starts below the ground. Once the corn is in the ground, there is no rescue. The seeds must survive 2 to 3 weeks, until it can compete. Seedling insect damage is a very high risk.

Seedling damage is not simply yield reduction of just a ton or two—it is a 100% loss. It is different than the scouting we do all summer long to look for insects and pests.

On our farm we have success using ½ the rate of the industry standard neonic rate, a 250 rate combined with an insecticide and have reliable results.

Seedlings need protection for 2 to 3 weeks after planting, specifically from:

- Wire worm
- White grub
- Back Cut worm

- Fall Armyworm
- Seed corn maggot

These insects are in the soil and are not visible.

Additionally, let's not lose sight that we are at a time when our focus is on growing more of our own feed, and importing less.

Last year we were able to harvest snaplage, that is snapping and grinding only the ear of the corn, to replace imported corn meal. There is constant talk about what will be our next crop adventure.

We ask that you consider the unintended consequences to taking this tool away. It upends our entire system we've been working so hard to build.

It is not difficult for us to feel for our beekeepers. It is scary what they are going through. I asked our agronomist what we could do to help, he pointed out that some farms are adding low growing clover to provide forage for the bees. It grows low and remains after harvesting. Unfortunately, a successful legume or hay harvest for dairy feed, is before there are any flowers. Once the plant flowers, it's a quick drop in quality. We lose protein and digestibility. A low growing forage seed is possibly something we can do.

I really thank this committee for your thoughtfulness in hearing the issue from **all** who are affected. We care deeply about our impacts and approach every facet of our business with care, with support of the latest available data, supported by science