



February 18, 2024

To: Rep. David Durfee; House Committee on Agriculture
Cc: House Committee on Agriculture
From: Kevin Kouri; Director of Nutrition and Sales for Phoenix Feeds and Nutrition

Thank you for inviting me to your committee to discuss H.706 - An Act Relating to Banning the Use of Neonicotinoid Pesticides.

I am the Director of Nutrition and Sales for Phoenix Feeds and Nutrition in New Haven. I have a BS from UVM in Animal Science and hold a master's degree in Dairy Nutrition from UCONN. I am recognized as a Professional Animal Scientist under the American Registry of Professional Animal Scientists.

I have advised dairy producers regionally and internationally since 2003 when I returned to Vermont from Connecticut to start my professional career. My current role takes me to all corners of the State serving our dairy producers, along with visiting the surrounding states we border, and continue to visit other dairy producers in New England and New York advising them on the best nutrition management practices for their dairy cattle and farm. Phoenix Feeds serves all of New England and parts of New York out of our headquarters in New Haven with milling sites in New Haven and Brandon, VT. In February of 2023 we acquired a third milling site in Augusta, Maine. We employ 65 people in Vermont and 15 in Maine and are working towards being 100% employee owned as an Employee Stock Ownership (ESOP).

Vermont dairy generates 70% of Vermont's agricultural sales, \$2.2 Billion dollars in annual activity in the state, and \$3 million dollars in circulating daily cash generated by dairy. It is important to remember that today there are less than 500 farms, which is almost 2/3 less farms than when I started in 2003. Behind the 500 or so farms remaining in the State are the auxiliary businesses and the intertwined web of infrastructure and the people those businesses employ.

I ask that your committee address the inequities in H.706 and its impact on dairy in Vermont. The timeline of implementation is inequitable, removing proven technology is inequitable, the view that row crop forages in the State aren't needed is inequitable. Corn grain moving from Quebec to Vermont is not the same type of corn seed needed to produce corn silage. We have grains moving around our region in multiple directions in a day that are used to feed the animals in this

state. We need to work together and find common ground and work with our partners across the entire state along with outside entities to realize that a full-on ban of Neonics on 1/1/2027 is not achievable and is inequitable. Science needs to prevail.

This bill as written will remove an important tool from our producers. The timeline outlined in H.706 cannot be met by the seed industry to provide alternative solutions. We are misguided to think that this is enough time for producers to rework their forage plans. Seed selection is not a type that fits all scenarios for dairy producers represented by VDPA. One seed that may work in Orleans County may not work in Addison or Franklin County. Time and time again we see differences in growing conditions across the state and producers and their agronomy consultants have honed in best crop management practices for their farm. It is not a shot gun approach.

We want to be aligned with our neighbors if we were to establish an “off-ramp” for neonicotinoid seeds. The 2027 deadline is two years ahead of New York State and will most likely put Vermont on an island when it comes to being served by seed companies. Dairy margins are thin enough that we should not allow less economical and viable options to be presented to our producers. We need to be on an equal playing field to compete regionally and globally. The effect this would have across the entire farm financials would be devastating. Our milk market is secure with proximity to Boston and New York City. Regional milk production is necessary as we need to move milk into bottling facilities within 36 hours of leaving the dairies.

Recently, I was in Albany visiting the New York Legislature with fellow Agribusinesses and discussing all the exciting initiatives going on between state and private sector to grow all AG sectors. The next day I was in Augusta, ME visiting with the State Legislature regarding the renewal of the Dairy Tier Program, again, collaborative efforts. I left both those meetings thinking we need to find more synergistic energy like New York and Maine, in Vermont.

I respectfully request that the House Committee closely review the findings with NY S8031 and consider alternative options before passing H.706. There are more equitable solutions that can be achieved for our state dairy producers.

Thank you for your time.