

Intro to H.706, a Pollinator Protection Bill

First I want to commend this committee for the great amount of background work you have already done on this issue and the wide array of witnesses and testimony you have heard on pollinators and neonicotinoid use. The work you have done almost makes this introduction unnecessary.

Neonicotinoid use has been increasing since the 1990s to the point where virtually 100% of corn in Vermont and 30% of soybeans are grown using treated seed. Along with that growing use is a growing body of research examining in detail not just the damage neonics wreck on pollinators of many species and the environment at large, but also the questioning the benefits claimed from their use, and what less destructive alternatives may be.

In addition to the great research being carried out here in Vermont and at the Cornell Lab in New York, we have the benefit of 5 years of real life experience in Quebec where neonics have been prohibited since 2019. This is not theoretical anymore.

Until now the possible actions Vermont could take to reduce use of neonicotinoids have been limited and largely symbolic, but New York's adoption of the Birds and Bees Act provides a potent economic tool for change, a powerful incentive for pesticide and seed producers to develop alternative products and distribution systems for untreated seed, and a powerful incentive to reinvigorate IPM practices and non-chemical farming. By partnering with New York's effort we can help them achieve their goals while reaping our own benefits.

The bill has three major components:

1. It prohibits the sale or use of corn, soy, wheat, and cereal seeds treated with neonicotinoids. It prohibits many foliar applications of neonics to crops, plants, and turf that risk significant harm to pollinators.
2. Critically, it allows ANR, in consultation with AAFM, to provide emergency exemptions if the market fails to provide an adequate supply of untreated seed or if enforcement would create financial hardship for farmers.
3. It provides time for market innovation and adaptation. Since this bill was drafted New York State has extended the timelines of their law and I fully expect that we will update our timelines to coincide with New York's further extending the timelines in this bill.

Finally, I want to clarify that this bill does not pit dairy farmers against bee keepers or environmentalists against polluters. We are all stewards of our state and farmers, whether of bees or cows, take that responsibility seriously. The ultimate purpose of this bill is a win/win; a healthy environment, healthy pollinators, healthy and productive farms that save money in the process.

Thank you for taking up this bill.

Rep. Robin Chesnut-Tangerman
Vice Chair, General and Housing Committee