



CENTER FOR  
FOOD SAFETY

March 7, 2016

Senator Cathleen Galgiani, Chair, Senate Agriculture Committee  
Legislative Office Building, Room 583  
1020 N Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
Fax: (916) 403-7397

**RE: Support for SB 1282 (Leno-Allen), the Pollinator Protection Act**

Dear Chairwoman Galgiani,

Center for Food Safety (CFS) is a national, non-profit public interest organization that works to protect human health and the environment by curbing the use of harmful food production methods and by promoting safe and sustainable alternatives. CFS and its California members are concerned about the impacts of pesticides on biodiversity generally, and on honey bees and other pollinators specifically. This letter is to express our support for SB 1282 (Leno-Allen), the Pollinator Protection Act.

Over the past decade, the loss of pollinators in the United States has been alarmingly high, with dramatic declines in populations of honey bees, wild bees, butterflies, birds and other pollinators. Last year, California beekeepers lost a staggering 40 percent of their hives, and wild bee populations have declined by 23 percent between 2003-2008 in the Central Valley and other key agricultural regions of the country. Pollinator declines affect the entire food system, as one in every three bites of our food requires pollination services – an ecosystem service valued at 20 to 30 billion dollars annually in the United States. Each year, more than a million colonies of honey bees are required to pollinate California's almonds – an industry worth \$6 billion.

A leading threat to bees and other pollinators is exposure to neonicotinoids and other systemic, persistent insecticides. Neonicotinoids are the most widely used insecticides in the world, and unlike traditional pesticides, that are typically applied to the surface of plants, neonicotinoids are systemic—meaning they are absorbed and transported through all parts of the plant tissue. Honey bees and other pollinators are exposed to these toxic chemicals through pollen, nectar, dust, dew droplets on plant leaves, and in the soil where many native bee species nest. Modeled after nicotine, neonicotinoids interfere with the nervous system of insects, causing tremors, paralysis, and eventually death. Neonicotinoids are up to 10,000 times more toxic to bees than other insecticides and their use can have immediate and long-term effects. In addition to killing bees outright, research shows that exposure to even low levels of neonicotinoids cause serious harm by impairing bees' ability to learn, find their way back to the hive, collect food, produce new queens, or to mount an effective immune response.

Neonicotinoids are also concerning because they persist in the environment and can accumulate

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quickly. This characteristic has caused contamination of surface water, groundwater and soil, endangering species that inhabit these ecosystems. Harmful effects from this type of contamination have been identified in aquatic invertebrates, and additional concern exists with respect to long-term impacts on waterfowl, rangeland birds and other wild animals.

It is estimated that there are more than 500 different neonicotinoid products on the market today. These toxic pesticides have been approved for use not only in agriculture, but also for ornamental and landscaping purposes, allowing individuals to purchase these products in nursery and home improvement stores for use in their backyards and gardens. Unfortunately, consumers often overuse neonicotinoids, and products approved for home and garden use may be applied at rates up to 120 times higher than what is approved for agricultural uses. Even more alarming is the fact that consumers may be completely unaware that many “bee friendly” garden plants and vegetable seedlings sold at home garden centers have been pre-treated with neonicotinoids, resulting in unintentional harm to the pollinators visiting these plants in their backyards and gardens.

California must act now to inform consumers about garden and nursery plants that have been pre-treated with these toxic pesticides. California also has the ability to be a leading state in protecting pollinators by reclassifying neonicotinoid chemicals as a “restricted material.” By taking measures to label neonicotinoid-treated plants and restrict of the sale of neonicotinoid pesticides to certified applicators, California will help to protect bees and other pollinators from further harm as a result of neonicotinoid exposure.

Thank you for considering our comments and we urge your strong leadership and support in passing SB 1282.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rebecca Spector". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rebecca Spector  
West Coast Director  
San Francisco, CA