

**Testimony of Jeannie M. Tapley, Executive Director, Maine Potato Board to the
Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
April 15, 2025**

LD 1323 – An Act to Prohibit the Use of Neonicotinoid Pesticides and the Use and Sale of Neonicotinoid-treated Seeds

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker and members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee, I am Jeannie Tapley, Executive Director of the Maine Potato Board. I am here today to speak in opposition to LD 1323.

Neonicotinoids (Neonics) are an extremely important part of the integrated pest management (IPM) programs used by agriculture and the potato industry in Maine. The vast majority of our growers use IPM to protect their potatoes as well as some of their rotational crops to keep pests below the economic thresholds where damage to the crops can occur. A major component of IPM is the ability to rotate chemistries to prevent resistance from the single use of one crop protectant; that is one way the loss of one chemistry such as neonicotinoids could have a negative impact.

Over the years, we have said many times that the approval of use and regulation of pesticides must be based on science. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) completes rigorous risk assessments for neonicotinoids and they will pursue risk mitigation as appropriate. These neonics are strictly regulated, tested and reviewed to ensure compliance with state and federal standards. In those risk assessments, the EPA has reported that the risk with pre-treated seed is low.

Neonicotinoids (“neonics”) are used in agriculture to safeguard crops from damaging pests, the diseases they carry and enable climate smart ag practices. Evidence is clear that neonics are a safe and effective solution for pest management and help reduce the amount of pesticides farmers ultimately have to use to grow healthy and affordable food. The risk of crop failure due to pests and the inability to replant due to Maine’s short growing season, can drastically impact a farmer’s growing season and yield. Some pest damage simply can’t be avoided without pesticides, and neglecting treatment could result in irreversible damage to soil health.

Neonicotinoid use as seed treatments or in-furrow applications target Colorado Potato Beetle and aphids; two of the major invasive potato pests in Maine. These methods utilize the systemic properties of neonicotinoids resulting in a reduction of foliar insecticide applications, increased worker safety, and are less impactful to beneficial insects.

Maine potato growers are committed to the implementation of proven IPM programs, which involves the sound application of approved and regulated crop protectants. At the same time a growing number of producers have transitioned to three- and four-year crop rotations resulting in several thousand acres of cover crops, such as red and white clovers and multi-species mixes which are untreated and provide habitat for bees and other pollinators. Maine is experiencing a more stable bee population compared to the national trend. Most hive losses in Maine occur during the winter, and a significant percentage of these losses is due to varroa mites and associated viruses.

In 2021, the Maine Legislature passed a law directing the Maine Board of Pesticide Control to prohibit the use of certain neonics for outdoor residential use. This law prohibits the use of pesticides containing dinotefuran, clothianidin, imidacloprid, or thiamethoxam in outdoor residential areas. Agriculture was granted a necessary exemption from this ban, recognizing the unique challenges faced by farmers. This was a reasonable and responsible approach which achieved the goal of protecting pollinator populations in Maine by limiting access to neonicotinoids to farmers and licensed professionals.

If important tools like these are removed, alternative pest management methods, mid-season rescue treatments, and/or the potential for yield reductions will raise farmer costs and lower production, all of which impact downstream food costs and consumers. As Maine aims to increase locally grown food consumption to 30% by 2030, depriving growers of the tools they need could impede this goal and put Maine's farmers at a competitive disadvantage relative to their peers across New England.

If there were alternatives that could be used that had the same effectiveness, I'm sure commercial agriculture in Maine would adopt those practices; but until there are other crop protectants with the same efficacy, removing these tools would force farmers to rely on antiquated pest control options and roll back the industry's climate-smart practices. Less effective products require more foliar spraying. In addition to significantly increased spraying, loss of neonics in the pest management rotation accelerates the development of resistance for pest management.

We are also greatly concerned with the exemption process stated in this bill. Growers would need to apply for an exemption at the beginning of every year because an agricultural emergency is just that, an emergency. In the case that there is an emergency that occurs on a Saturday, growers can't wait until the following Monday to contact the Commissioner's office to get an exemption and hope for a quick turnaround on approval of that. At that point, it may be too late as some pests can wipe out fields in the matters of hours or a couple of days. I am also concerned that the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry does not have the staff or capacity to administer an exemption on a field-by-field basis across all of agriculture in Maine.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)'s Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) is currently funding a four-year, Potatoes USA-supported research project to develop and evaluate potential alternatives to neonicotinoids for pest management. Until there is more research and alternatives that are as effective, we ask that you please vote ought not to pass on LD 1323 and do not remove much needed tools from our farming community. Thank you for your time and I will be happy to answer any questions you have now and will be available at the work session.

Neonic Restrictions Will Remove Farmers' Tools, **Create Unintended Consequences**



Neonicotinoids ("neonics") are used in agriculture to safeguard crops from damaging pests and enable climate smart ag practices. Evidence is clear that neonics are a safe and effective solution for pest management and help reduce the amount of pesticides farmers ultimately use to grow healthy and affordable food.

Removing this tool would force farmers to rely on antiquated pest control options and roll back the industry's climate-smart practices. Legislators should listen to farmers and understand the benefits neonics provide for agriculture, the environment, and food prices.

Neonics are essential to enabling climate smart ag practices and increasing crop yields.

Seed treatments like neonics safeguard popular crops from pests and the diseases they carry. The risk of crop failure due to pests and the inability to replant can drastically impact a farmer's growing season and yield. Some pest damages simply can't be avoided without pesticides, and neglecting treatment could result in irreversible damage to soil health.

Neonics are highly targeted and ensure minimal dosage is applied compared to other pesticides that are used over the top of plants. Farmers' access to neonics enhances their crop yields while using less land and fewer pesticides. One pound of seed treatment would need to be replaced with five pounds of other forms of pesticides, resulting in an increase in application rate per acre of 375%. Farmland would have to increase between 340,000 and 410,000 acres to offset losses in yield and quality. Eliminating access to neonics would force farmers to employ more pesticides and costlier farming practices to grow the same amount of food.

These pesticides are strictly regulated, tested, and reviewed to ensure compliance with state and federal standards.

Neonics are subject to regulation at both the federal and state levels. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and various state agencies oversee regulation. The EPA conducts regular re-evaluations of pesticides to ensure ongoing compliance with safety standards and the latest research and data on their impact.* This regulatory system has led to safe food, healthy soil, and environmentally-friendly agriculture practices.

*As part of its registration review process, the EPA is currently in the midst of re-registering the neonic class of chemistry. The Interim Decision regarding this matter is scheduled in 2024.



Neonics are key to taking strong climate action.

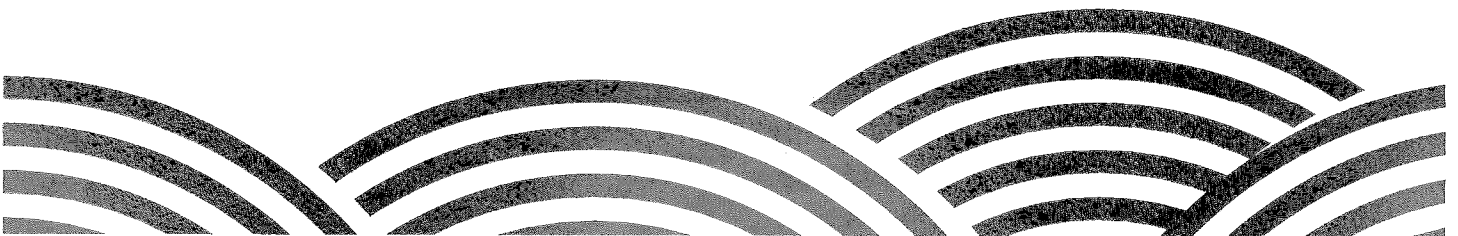
With neonics, farmers can minimize the need for extensive tillage, a process that can release carbon dioxide from the soil. Additionally, this approach reduces reliance on tractor diesel. Restricting neonics would remove these climate-smart agriculture practices and reverse our progress in addressing the climate crisis.

This tool is vital to Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and pollinator health.

Farmers depend on pollinators to grow many fruits and vegetables. Neonics and other seed treatments mitigate exposure by limiting application to the seed. Despite neonic-treated seed being used since 1980, evidence suggests honey bee colonies are increasing and collapse disorder is improving. Honey bee colonies increased by 45% worldwide over the past 50 years. According to the USDA, the number of colonies in the U.S increased by 13% in the past five years. Neonic use doesn't correlate with pollinator loss, either, according to data compiled by the USDA's [National Agricultural Statistics Center](#) in 2023. The data indicates Varroa is the leading cause of honey bee loss. Pesticides are predominantly near the bottom of causes.

Legislators should listen to farmers before needlessly raising the cost to grow food.

Removing access to rigorously tested and approved neonics would result in higher operational costs and pressures on the supply chains. That's because farmers would be compelled to invest in a larger supply of non-targeted pesticides, carry out the potential need for field replants, or use more land to grow the same amount of yield. Consumers, especially low-income homes, will notice the acute impact from higher food costs. Policymakers shouldn't pass legislation that exacerbates access to affordable and healthy food based on flimsy evidence of the environmental benefits.



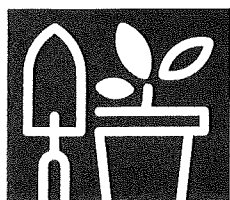


Maine's backyard beehives see highest survival rate in 8 years

by Elizabeth Walztoni
January 30, 2025



A honey bee pollinates a blueberry plant at Wyman's of Maine's blueberry fields in this 2021 file photo. Credit: Courtesy of Wyman's of Maine



Homestead

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Honeybee hives regularly die off from a number of threats including parasitic disease-spreading mites, pesticides, starvation and unpredictable weather conditions.

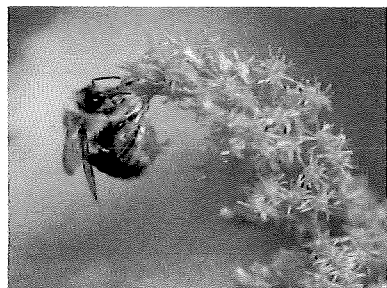
But Maine data has shown that trend dropping, which an expert thinks might be due to education efforts. Along with producing local honey, honeybees pollinate about 80 percent of all flowering plants and most of the fruit and vegetable plants people rely on.



The latest survey included data from nearly 300 of the state's 1,300-plus registered beekeepers, spanning April 2023 to April 2024. More than 2,000 hives were represented.

Of those hives, 24.3 percent were lost. That's about a 13 percent drop from the year before. Common causes were mites and viruses, losing the hive's queen, starvation and environmental reasons.

HOW TO HELP POLLINATORS



How you can mow your lawn this spring while helping out pollinators

by [Leela Stockley](#) April 27, 2022

Surveys use a variety of methods and can't be compared exactly, but national surveys have found higher loss rates of up to 48 percent nationally in recent years.

Overall, state apiarist Jen Lund said she was "really pleased" with Maine's results this year. Since she started surveying eight years ago, rates have tended to go up a percentage point one year and drop down several the next, trending down overall.

Lund thinks that has a lot to do with beekeeper education about how to manage bees and fight risks such as parasitic varroa mites, which also transfer diseases.

A few dozen new beekeepers have registered most years since 2016 as well, and the licensing process involves education and mentorship.

Maine beekeepers are interested: Lund alone gives about 60 talks each year to beekeepers and community groups about the many facets of bee health and management.

Educational events are a focus of monthly meetings for the 50 members of the Penobscot County Beekeepers Association, said secretary Diane Brown, who keeps several hives in Milford with her husband. Members host speakers such as Lund, attend online webinars and visit each other's hives to learn from each other.

The beekeeping group has become the couple's community, introducing them to new friends and neighbors. But the ongoing education is also necessary, she said, because bees are complicated.

The Browns lost a hive for the first time in 2024, likely to varroa mites. Though losing a hive is disappointing and can set a beekeeper back several hundred dollars, it's not an unusually concerning event.

Most buy their "nucs," or starting hives, from the South and aren't worried about future supply, according to Brown.

Backyard honeybees like these are quite different from Maine's 270-plus species of native bees, though. Lund compares honeybees to livestock, with food and care provided, while native wild bees are more like wildlife.

Wild bee populations are also at risk overall, with various studies suggesting their populations are dropping across species.



Here's what you can do to help bees thrive in Maine

by [Julia Bayly](#) August 9, 2018

But in Maine and most of New England, wild bees also have a lot going for them. Unlike states where thousands of acres are paved into cities or planted with just one crop such as corn or soybeans, bees have open land with unique plants to pollinate here, Lund said.

Native bees can pollinate native plants more efficiently, and they don't catch the same diseases that honeybees face. Their solitary nature means mites also can't get a foothold and affect many of them at once, like they do in hives.

Many residents are interested in providing habitat and food for them, holding off mowing their lawns in May or adding native plants to their gardens.

"It's a really great place to be a bee," she said.

