January 20, 2021

Honorable Andrew Cuomo  
Governor  
New York State Capitol  
Albany, NY 12224

Honorable Andrea Stewart-Cousins  
Temporary President and Majority Leader  
New York State Senate  
Albany, NY 12247

Honorable Carl Heastie  
Speaker  
New York State Assembly  
Albany, NY 12247

Honorable Todd Kaminsky  
Chair, New York Senate Environmental Conservation Committee  
New York State Senate  
Albany, NY 12247

Honorable Steven Englebright  
Chair, New York Assembly Environmental Conservation Committee  
New York State Assembly  
Albany, NY 12247

Re: Protect New York’s Food Systems and Health from Neonicotinoid Pesticides

Dear Governor Cuomo, President and Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, Speaker Heastie, and Chairmen Kaminsky and Englebright:

As chefs and food professionals who lead the culinary movement in New York and across the globe, we ask for your support in helping to stop the uses of highly bee-toxic neonicotinoid pesticides or “neonics” that threaten to wipe out New York State’s bees and other critical pollinators. As you’re well aware, the challenges faced by the restaurant industry due to the Covid-19 crisis have been nothing less than crippling. To add to this, the uncertainties for recovery become even more dire when the use of deadly neonics threatens our food system.

Food is the instrument of our craft, and our passion to create satisfying, nutritious meals is born from the quality and freshness of the food we procure. We rely on local farmers to source these ingredients creating a symbiotic relationship of commerce with our local growers who, in turn, rely on bees and other pollinators. Seventy-five percent of the world’s food crops depend, in some part, on bees.¹ New York’s top crops like apples, squash, blueberries, and peaches and other pollination-dependent crops contribute an estimated $1.2 billion annually to the local agricultural economy.² The continued use of neonics threatens this already delicate relationship between agricultural safety, local growers, and food professionals.
Bees and other pollinators are dying across the globe at record rates with New York beekeepers losing over 40% of their bee colonies nearly every year for the past decade. According to the United Nations, these losses are a threat to food security, as pollinators are also critical for increasing yields of many staple crops that aren’t strictly pollinator-dependent. They also threaten the access to, and the affordability of, the diverse, local produce that our profession relies upon.

Governments around the world, including the European Union, Canada, and the U.S. via the Environmental Protection Agency have recognized the considerable dangers posed by the use of neonic pesticides. Independent research shows that neonics are a leading and avoidable cause of bee and pollinator declines. For example, neonic coatings on corn and soybean seeds known as “seed treatments” account for 73% of the neonic use in New York, yet Cornell University research finds they provide “no overall net-income benefits” to farmers compared to untreated seeds. In some cases, they may even decrease yields.

Additionally, research shows both that neonics may harm human health—including heart and brain development in children—and that they may be near impossible to avoid in daily life. Neonics permeate our food and contaminate our water, as they have done extensively in New York State. Neonic pollution is so pervasive that not only do they appear in conventional produce and processed products like baby food, but even in organic foods where neonic use is prohibited. Neonics seep into food and can’t be removed by washing, therefore it’s not surprising that the Centers for Disease Control released a report last year indicating that at least half of the U.S. population is regularly exposed to neonics.

We call on upon you to follow the lead of governments like the European Union and Canada to stop harmful neonic use in New York. At a time when our own federal government has been either unequipped or unwilling to protect New Yorkers from the risks threatening their lives and their livelihoods, New York itself must blaze the trail. We trust in your leadership and your willingness to enact such trail blazing protections, such as last session’s Birds and Bees Protection Act (A7639A /S5816) or comparable administrative measures, needed to protect our food system and our health from the threat of neonic pesticides. Losing our pollinators as a result of the unbridled use of neonics is not an option any of us should entertain.

In closing, we would like to thank you for your unwavering dedication to our great state of New York and as well as for your prompt and proactive attention to this pressing matter.

Respectfully,

Tom Valenti
Executive Chef
Oxbow Tavern

Ted Allen
Host
Food Network’s Chopped

Terrance Brennan
Owner
Brennan Group Hospitality
Anne Burrell  
Chef and Food Network Personality

Antoine Camin  
Owner and Chef  
Orsay and Le Goulue

Scott Conant  
Chef  
Celliaio Steak

Tom Colicchio  
Chef and Owner  
Crafted Hospitality

Kerry Heffernan  
Executive Chef  
Grand Banks

Michael Lomonaco  
Chef/Partner  
Porter House Bar and Grill

Danny Meyer  
Founder and CEO  
Union Square Hospitality Group

Becca Parrish  
CEO, Founder  
Becca

Marcus Samuelsson  
Founder  
Red Rooster

Geoffrey Zakarian  
Executive Chef  
The Lambs Club

CC: Basil Seggos, Commissioner, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

---

1 Merrit Kennedy, Report: More Pollinator Species in Jeopardy, Threatening World Food Supply, NPR (Feb. 26, 2016), [https://n.pr/2TM1G2X](https://n.pr/2TM1G2X).