

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.³ 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.⁴ 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.⁵ Independent research shows that neonics are a leading and avoidable cause of bee and pollinator declines.⁶ For example, neonic coatings on corn and soybean seeds known as "seed treatments" account for 73% of the neonic use in New York,⁷ yet Cornell University research finds they provide "no overall net-income benefits" to farmers compared to untreated seeds.⁸ In some cases, they may even decrease yields.⁹

Additionally, research shows both that neonics may harm human health—including heart and brain development in children¹⁰—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.¹¹ 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.¹² 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.¹³

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.¹⁴ 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
Celliao 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>.

² U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, *2019 State Agriculture Overview: New York* (accessed May 28, 2020), <https://bit.ly/2HpaXtE>; DEC & NY Dep't of Ag. and Markets (DAM), *New York State Pollinator Protection Plan Update*, 8 (Jun. 2018), <https://on.ny.gov/2MaKxM3>.

³ See Bee Informed Partnership, *2018/19 Total Annual Colony Loss Map*, (accessed May 28, 2020), <https://bit.ly/2HpheoW>, and select “Annual” under the “Season” tab.

⁴ United Nations Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), *The Assessment Report on Pollinators, Pollination and Food Production: Summary for Policymakers* (2016), <https://bit.ly/3dhEJMy>.

⁵ See, e.g., European Food Safety Authority, *Q&A: Conclusions on Neonicotinoids 2018* (Feb. 28, 2018), <https://bit.ly/2jsXsdN>; Canadian Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA), *Proposed Re-evaluation Decision PRVD2018-12, Imidacloprid and Its Associated End-use Products: Pollinator Re-evaluation* (May 31, 2018), <https://bit.ly/2QILHVI>; EPA, *Preliminary Bee Risk Assessment to Support the Registration Review of Clothianidin and Thiamethoxam*, 14-23 (Jan. 5, 2017), <https://bit.ly/2jfMFon>; EPA, *Preliminary Aquatic Risk Assessment to Support the Registration Review of Imidacloprid*, 8-9 (Dec. 22, 2016), <https://bit.ly/2r3Uuyv>.

⁶ See Lennard Pisa et al., *An Update of the Worldwide Integrated Assessment (WIA) on Systemic Insecticides. Part 2: Impacts on Organisms and Ecosystems*, *Envtl. Sci. Pollution Research Int'l* (Nov. 9, 2017), <https://bit.ly/2HqqHwB>; Thomas Wood & Dave Goulson, *The Environmental Risks of Neonicotinoid Pesticides: A Review of the Evidence Post 2013*, *Envtl. Sci. Pollution Research Int'l*, 24(21): 17285–17325 (Jun. 7, 2017), <https://bit.ly/2Hpn8T5>; Daniel Cressey, *Largest-ever Study of Controversial Pesticides Finds Harm to Bees*, *Nature* (Jun. 29, 2017), <https://go.nature.com/2sgJjDk>; B.A. Woodcock et al., *Country-specific Effects of Neonicotinoid Pesticides on Honeybees and Wild Bees*, *Science*, 356(6345): 1393-1395 (Jun. 30, 2017), <https://bit.ly/3nIy3vD>.

⁷ See Pierre Mineau, *An Assessment of Neonicotinoid Insecticides with Emphasis on New York: Use, Contamination, Impacts on Aquatic Systems, and Agronomic Aspects*, 49 (2019), <https://on.nrdc.org/3gBtpgw>.

⁸ Travis A. Grout et al., *Neonicotinoid Insecticides in New York State*, Cornell University (2020), <https://bit.ly/3swDDVA>; see also Spyridon Mourtzinis et al., *Neonicotinoid Seed Treatments of Soybean Provide Negligible Benefits to US Farmers*, *Sci. Reports* (Sep. 9, 2019), <https://go.nature.com/2p5leCP>; Christian Krupke et al., *Planting of Neonicotinoid-Treated Maize Poses Risks for Honey Bees and Other Non-Target Organisms Over a Wide Area Without Consistent Crop Yield Benefit*, *J. of Applied Ecol.* (May 22, 2017), <https://bit.ly/36aMZtD>.

⁹ See *Id.*; Margaret Douglas et al., *Neonicotinoid Insecticide Travels Through a Soil Food Chain, Disrupting Biological Control of Non-Target Pests and Decreasing Soya Bean Yield*, *Journal of Applied Ecology* (Feb. 2015), <https://bit.ly/2IRr4MF>; Dara A. Stanley et al., *Neonicotinoid Pesticide Exposure Impairs Crop Pollination Services Provided by Bumblebees*, *Nature* (Nov. 18, 2015), <https://bit.ly/2qnhWLW>.

¹⁰ Jennifer Sass et al., *Letter from Environmental Health Experts to EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler Regarding Neonicotinoid Insecticides* (Jan. 14, 2020), <https://on.nrdc.org/38pGQdY>; A. Cimino et al., *Effects of Neonicotinoid Pesticide Exposure on Human Health: A Systematic Review*, 125 *Envtl. Health Persp.* 155-62 (2017), <https://bit.ly/2NVA1LR>.

¹¹ See Pierre Mineau, *Impacts of Neonics in New York Water* (2019), <https://on.nrdc.org/2lXsO0O>.

¹² H. A. Craddock et al., *Trends in Neonicotinoid Pesticide Residues in Food and Water in the United States, 1999-2015*, *Envtl. Health* (Jan. 11, 2019), <https://bit.ly/30GxV5D>.

¹³ M. Ospina et al., *Exposure to Neonicotinoid Insecticides in the U.S. General Population*, *Envtl. Res.* (Jun. 24, 2019), <https://bit.ly/2q11yRf>.

¹⁴ See European Commission, *Protecting Bees: EU Set to Completely Ban Outdoor Use of Pesticides Harmful to Bees* (Apr. 27, 2018), <https://bit.ly/2HwtNee>; PMRA, *Proposed Special Review Decision PSRD2018-01, Special Review of Clothianidin Risk to Aquatic Invertebrates* (Aug. 15, 2018), <https://bit.ly/2x2MHGk>; PMRA, *Proposed Special Review Decision PSRD2018-02, Special Review of Thiamethoxam Risk to Aquatic Invertebrates* (Aug. 15, 2018), <https://bit.ly/2wZbYQZ>; PMRA, *Proposed Re-evaluation Decision PRVD2016-20, Imidacloprid* (Nov. 23, 2016), <https://bit.ly/2Ky4iu4>.