House Committee on Climate, Energy and Environment

March 4, 2025

Oregon Farm Bureau Comments on HB 2679

Oregon Farm Bureau ("OFB") is the state's largest general agriculture organization, representing over 6500 family farms and ranches that produce more than 220 agricultural commodities. From hops and hazelnuts to cattle, clover, and timber with operations spanning from just a few acres to thousands, our members utilize all farming methods including organic, conventional, regenerative, biotech, and even no-tech.

Pollinator health is important to Oregon agriculture.
Pollinators are vitally important to Oregon agriculture. Concerns around pesticide use and the potential effects on pollinators are important to all pesticide users, but especially growers. Oregon farmers depend on bees to pollinate many of their crops, but they also depend on pesticide tools to control destructive pests. It's a balance, and Oregon growers and beekeepers have a vested interest in ensuring that protecting bee health and the use of pesticides are not mutually exclusive.

Pollinator health is a complex issue. While we understand the concerns of the public regarding insecticide use, the issue of declining bee populations unfortunately has no simple answer. In fact, research on Colony Collapse Disorder has highlighted a complex interaction of factors that play a role in bee health with no singular cause of the problem.[1] While pesticides are often noted as one factor, they are not considered the primary one. Pests, diseases and nutrition all play a role.

Oregon is doing its part to protect honeybees.
Since reports of significant losses to bee colonies were publicized, OSU researchers and state and federal regulators have been looking for answers. In 2013, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) added a "bee box" to the label of certain neonicotinoids.[2] The label change alerts applicators to new restrictions on use: when bees are present, the use of some pesticide products will be prohibited.

In the 2014 legislative session, Oregon took a proactive step to address pollinator health and passed House Bill 4139. House Bill 4139 established a Pollinator Task Force which was tasked with finding collaborative solutions to pollinator concerns. Legislation passed

[1] https://www.ars.usda.gov/is/br/ccd/ccd_actionplan.pdf
[2] https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2013-11/documents/bee-label-info-graphic.pdf

in subsequent years to address the priority recommendations of Oregon's pollinator task force, including:

- Development of a strong, effective outreach and education strategy on pollinator health, including best management practices.
- Fund a state-of-the-art bee health diagnostic facility at Oregon State University.
- Develop an integrated pollinator health research plan to improve understanding of the many issues affecting pollinator health.
- Fund the proposed outreach, education and research programs.

In 2015 and 2017, OFB was a proud partner in helping to fund pollinator education and outreach through Oregon State University's Statewides programs (i.e. the Oregon Bee Project)[3] and partnering with residential beekeepers to support Good Beekeeping Practices in urban areas of the state.[4] In 2023, Oregon launched the Pollinator Paradise license plate with a surcharge that supports OSU extension research on pollinators.[5]

Reclassifying neonicotinoids is the wrong approach.
OFB disagrees with the approach in HB 2679, which would reclassify neonicotinoid products in Oregon as restricted use pesticides (RUP). Neonicotinoids are very widely used pesticides globally, particularly because of their very low toxicity to mammals and effectiveness against difficult-to-manage insects. These products were developed to address the concern of the safety of older pesticides and insect resistance challenges. Neonicotinoids are safe when used responsibly and in accordance with EPA-approved label instructions. Designating neonicotinoids as RUP would require small farms to look to other products, likely reverting to broader-spectrum or harsher chemistries, to control insects.

Approximately 96% of Oregon farms are family operated, and many of these operations use general use pesticides to avoid the cost and continuing education requirements associated with a pesticide license. Currently classified as general use, neonicotinoid products can be used by farms of all sizes, regardless of whether they have a private or commercial applicator's license. Additionally, many smaller farms use neonicotinoid pesticides in rotation with other tools to support the production of nursery crops, vegetables, berries, or clover. Even without a private applicator's license, these growers are trained in the proper use of these tools through OSU extension and other field days with their commodity groups. Many of these same farms also rely on commercial pollination services and would not jeopardize the health of pollinators they rent.

---

[3] https://www.oregonbeeproject.org/frequently-asked-questions
[4] https://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/pub/em-9186-residential-beekeeping-best-practice-guidelines-nuisance-free-beekeeping-oregon
[5] https://www.oregonlive.com/living/2023/01/new-oregon-bee-themed-license-plate-supports-pollinators.html

Reclassifying neonicotinoids would not provide a measurable benefit to bees, because pesticides are not the chief source of bee health problems in Oregon. Bee health is impacted by any number of issues, including Varroa mites (ecto–parasites), viruses and forage availability. OFB is also concerned about the emergence of foulbrood disease in honeybees, which is a bacterial disease that crashes colonies.[6]

As drafted HB 2679 reduces chemistries available to smaller growers, systemic or otherwise, and increases the risk of developing resistance to the remaining treatment options.

OFB supports the approach in the -1 amendment.
We raised the above concerns to Representative Zach Hudson and appreciate the thoughtfully tailored approach taken in the -1 amendment to HB 2679. OFB believes the amendment will address the concern of potential misuse of neonicotinoids by homeowners, while ensuring that professional uses in crop production and animal health remain available.

The -1 amendment borrows the approach that Colorado took, requiring that neonicotinoids be sold by licensed pesticide dealers. This approach, which was lauded by Environment Colorado and CoPIRG,[7][8] essentially removes the product from big box retail shelves and garden stores, places where homeowners often look to purchase chemicals to protect their gardens. Last year, legislators in Washington passed legislation that took a different tactic but achieved the same goal – maintaining professional uses of neonicotinoids while limiting residential use. OFB believes that the Oregon legislature could achieve the same outcome with a similar approach to Colorado's legislation.

OFB respectfully urges your consideration of the -1 amendment to HB 2679, which recognizes the needs of Oregon's natural resources communities while addressing policymakers' concerns with homeowner access to the product**.** As drafted, HB 2679 will have the unintended consequence of limiting small farm access to newer, safer pesticides without proven benefits to pollinators.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on the -1 amendment to HB 2679.

---

[6] https://news.oregonstate.edu/news/oregon-state-researchers-lead-42-million-usda-grant-study-disease-plaguing-honey-bees
[7] https://environmentamerica.org/colorado/updates/victory-new-law-protecting-pollinators-goes-into-effect/
[8] https://pirg.org/colorado/updates/colorado-poised-to-be-9th-state-to-protect-bees-limit-neonic-insecticides/