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OREGONIANS FOR FOOD & SHELTER

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A non-profit coalition to promote the efficient production of quality food and fiber while protecting human health, personal property and the environment, through the integrated, responsible use of pest management products, soil nutrients and biotechnology.

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HB 4139— Relating to pollinator health

11 February 2014

Testimony to the House Committee on Agriculture & Natural Resources

Honorable Committee Members:

Oregonians for Food & Shelter (OFS) is a grassroots coalition of farmers, foresters, and other technology users focused on natural resource issues involving pesticides, fertilizer, and biotechnology. We are writing you today in regards to HB 4139. We thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on this important issue.

The concerns around pesticide use and potential effects on bees are very important to all pesticide users, but especially those involved in agriculture. Oregon farmers depend on bees to pollinate many of their crops, but also depend on pesticide tools to control destructive pests. Similarly, commercial beekeepers rely on healthy crops to optimize their pollination services. This means that Oregon growers and beekeepers have a lot at stake in this conversation and each share a vested interest in ensuring that protecting bee health, and the use of pesticides, are not mutually exclusive. Bee health is important to all of us and nobody wants to see adverse incidents that add to bee population declines. That being said, it is easy to let emotion drive the conversation around these issues, when we should instead let science be our guide.

While we can understand the concerns of beekeepers, and the public at large, the issue of declining bee populations unfortunately has no simple answer. In fact, research on Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) has highlighted a complex interaction of factors that play a role in bee health and found no singular cause of the problem. While pesticides are often noted as one factor, they are not considered the primary one.

Since reports of significant losses to bee colonies were publicized in 2006, researchers and regulators have been looking for answers to what may be the cause. A CCD Steering Committee was formed at the national level to address the concerns over bee losses. Several individuals from the Steering Committee along with Pennsylvania State University met in October 2012 for a National Stakeholders Conference on Honey Bee Health to discuss future actions to promote health and mitigate risks to managed honey bees in the U.S. In May of this year the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and EPA released a comprehensive scientific report on honey bee health. The report concludes that there are multiple factors that play a role in honey bee colony declines.

Unfortunately, the original version of HB 4139 seeks to pin much of the blame, and all of the burden for pollinator health on a specific class of pesticides. This simply does not reflect the current science and would likely have little affect on bee populations while having a negative impact on our growers. In its original form the bill would have classified four active ingredients; imidacloprid, dinotefuran, thiamethoxam and clothianidin as Restricted Use Pesticides (RUPs). The RUP classification means that the products would only be available for purchase and use by licensed pesticide applicators. This effectively left homeowners, and agricultural growers who choose not to obtain a pesticide applicator license, without some of the most important, environmentally safe tools currently at their disposal. **We are opposed to the original bill.**

While the original bill is not a good solution, we agree that a more in depth conversation on pollinator health overall could be very beneficial. A workgroup would be able to take the time necessary to evaluate the science of the issue and make some recommendations for steps moving forward to help protect pollinators. While the -2 amendments move us closer to that goal, we still have concerns that parts of it “stack the deck” for a certain outcome. Proposed legislation may not end up being necessary, but the current bill requires it. We need a structure that allows for the group to make suggestions as they see fit—not with preconceived notions from this legislation.

We would like to thank Representative Reardon for reaching out to and working with stakeholders to craft a solution and are committed to continuing to work with him to create a bill that can truly help pollinators in Oregon.

Regards,



Scott J. Dahlman
Executive Director



Paulette L. Pyle
Grassroots Director