

Financing Food Justice



The importance of bees and other pollinators on our food system is substantial. About one out of every three bites we eat comes from plants pollinated by honeybees, and more than 85% of the plant species on earth require pollinators to exist. According to the [USDA](#), “bee-pollinated commodities account for \$20 billion in annual U.S. agricultural production and \$217 billion worldwide.” However, our food system faces peril as pollinator populations have declined significantly in recent years.

A growing body of science has emerged pointing to neonicotinoid pesticides, or “neonics,” the most widely used class of insecticides in the world, as a major contributor to bee losses.

To tackle this issue, ICCR members led by Trillium Asset Management and the Sustainability Group of Loring, Wolcott & Coolidge, approached nineteen companies exposed to potential systemic risks from declining pollinator populations. We found that few companies were taking concrete action to address these risks. Home Depot and Whole Foods Market proved to be the exception. Subsequent to constructive dialogues with investors and NGOs, both companies announced policies and practices to protect bees and other pollinators.

In June, Home Depot [announced](#) that before year end, it will require suppliers to label all plants treated with neonics, and will help suppliers eliminate their use. In addition, the Company now offers customers a list of neonic-free alternatives for home use. We believe this will set a precedent for other retailers.

[Whole Foods Market launched standards](#) ranking produce and flowers based on the suppliers’ efforts to protect air, soil, water, and human health. With this move, Whole Foods is the first buyer to reward farmers that adopt bee-friendly farming practices and limit the use of bee-harming pesticides. These standards give consumers choices and are an important step toward encouraging more sustainable agricultural practices.

These actions are a great start, but more needs to be done. We suggest the following actions to support the long-term vitality of our food system:

- Ask companies to take action to promote pollinator health and incentivize suppliers to utilize bee-friendly alternatives;
- Tell the EPA to support stronger policies to protect pollinators.

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