



## House Environment and Transportation Committee

February 4, 2026

**Bill No.: HB91 – An Act Concerning Agriculture – Neonicotinoid Pesticides – Prohibitions**

**Sponsors: Delegate Healey and Delegate Ruth**

**Position: Favorable**

**Joint testimony of Cleo Braver, Cottingham Farm and Steve Kraszewski, Mason Farms Produce**

Dear Chairman Korman and Members of the Committee,

### [Steve Kraszewski, Mason Farms Produce:](#)

**Mason Farms Produce produces nearly 900 acres of certified organic corn, soybeans and small grains in Queen Anne’s County, MD. The farm has been using untreated, non-neonic seed since 2006 and continues successfully farming to this day without it.**

**High quality seed, certified organic seed, including untreated non-GMO hybrids, are easy to source without any added expense nor have they reduced our family farm’s profitability in any way.** (see Seed Suppliers addenda)

### **Neonic seed treatments add risk, expense, time, inputs, and harm the farmer’s bottom line.**

Consider early-planted corn here on the Delmarva: a brief weather window in mid to late April for sowing. The farmer is wrongly given a manufactured confidence that coated seed will avert risk and ensure a successful early planting. While that seed sits and waits for its proper growing conditions, the risks pile up and manifest as poor stands: cold damp soil hampers seedling vigor; pests and disease introduce themselves on susceptible plants; the expense of extra starter nutrients outweighs the benefits of the anticipated early crop.

### **Neonic seed treatments give a false sense of security by trying to “hack” nature.**

Often requires more equipment passes across the field = more cost that squeezes any margins the farmer has left:

1. Added nutrient and pesticide applications to assist a struggling stand = loss
2. Crop insurance replant claims only cover a portion of a second planting = loss
3. Replant costs for portions of fields or entire farms = loss

A battery of treatments to stabilize / save a crop = crop welfare

Industry claims that neonic seed treatments are a farmer’s tool in their toolbox simply skirts a very important issue that every farmer should be aware of. Pests and disease at planting are a harbinger of other problems in the field that go unaddressed. And **neonics are a bad hack** to address them. The farmer’s trust, awareness and expertise in their own fields is outsourced to a “trustworthy” product from an industry that thinks it can supersede what a farmer already knows.

Our successful organic row crop operation uses the most reliable methods known for planting crops: quality, available seed; timing; environmental cues. We pay close attention to our soils and growing conditions because we know what’s best for our ground. You’ll find the ‘tried and true’ methods are posted on any blog, website or grower’s resources thread. Neonics, and the promises they offer, are a bad hack.

### [Cleo Braver, Cottingham Farm:](#)

**As a year-round vegetable farmer on Maryland’s Eastern Shore, I have experienced firsthand the impact of reduced and imperfect pollination of our food crops over the past almost 20 years.**

It can take as many as seven or eight pollination events – visits by a pollinator – to a tomato flower to sufficiently pollinate to grow a marketable tomato. And there are scores of flowers on each of **our up to 4,000 tomato plants**, which **require a half a million pollination events on a regular basis over a six-month season**.

**Even a modest reduction in pollinators materially impacts a farmer’s yield of marketable tomatoes.** Inadequate pollination leads to poor fruit set, smaller fruit (flowers are produced but few successfully develop into tomatoes), more irregular fruit, and less fruit, all of which decrease the grower’s yield. **Tomatoes**, one of the larger cash crops on our farm, **are not pollinated by human-managed honey bees, but rather by native bumblebee “buzz” pollinators. There are visibly far fewer bumblebees on our farm than there were 20 years ago. My experience with lower pollination rates mirrors studies that show that nationwide many food crop yields are “pollinator limited”.**

According to recent research, neonicotinoids are of specific concern <sup>1</sup> because they are systemic and poison every cell in the plant – nectar, pollen and fruit, they are extremely toxic to pollinators, and are carried long distances via irrigation and runoff contaminating non-crop species.

**We do not use pesticides on our organic farm, but nearby pesticide use likely has a devastating impact on the native bee populations on which we have historically relied. Nearby crops – corn, soy, wheat and other crops – grown from neonic-coated seeds are just as dangerous to my pollinators as are crops grown with field applied neonicotinoids!** It is a distinction without a difference.

On a micro level, one neonic-coated corn kernel can kill a small bird. On a macro level, you must understand that **some studies suggest that agriculture is now 48% more harmful to insects than it was before the introduction of neonicotinoid pesticides.**<sup>2</sup> And all this loss is allowed for no good reason: **all the insect pests purportedly targeted by neonics can be controlled by other means.** Worse yet, there is significant evidence that this harm to our pollinators takes place without even providing benefit to the user of these seed treatments.

For all these reasons, we ask the Committee to consider a favorable report on HB 91 and require neonicotinoid seed treatments to be limited in the same way that neonicotinoid consumer products are.

Very truly yours,  
Cleo P. Braver, Cottingham Farm, Talbot County Maryland  
Steve Kraszewski, Mason Farms Produce, Queen Anne’s County

See attached:

- 1) list of Alternatives to Neonicotinoid Seed Treatments and
- 2) list of example sources for purchasing non-neonic coated seeds

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<sup>1</sup> Janousek, W. M., Douglas, M. R., Cannings, S., Clément, M. A., Delphia, C. M., Everett, J. G., et al. (2023). Recent and future declines of a historically widespread pollinator linked to climate, land cover, and pesticides. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 120(2). <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2211223120>

<sup>2</sup> An assessment of acute insecticide toxicity loading (AITL) of chemical pesticides used on agricultural land in the United States Michael DiBartolomeis, Susan Kegley, Pierre Mineau, Rosemarie Radford, Kendra Klein. Published: August 6, 2019n <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0220029>

# Non-Neonic Treated Seed Suppliers by Crop

Some of the many seed suppliers offering alternatives to neonic-treated seed (names link to websites):

## Corn Seed Suppliers

- **Prairie Hybrids**
  - Specializing exclusively in **non-GMO** and **organic** field corn
- **Albert Lea Seed**
  - Blue River Organic Seeds, Viking Non-GMO Seed
- **Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds:**
- **Clarkson Grain**
  - Non-GMO and organic white, yellow, indigo blue, and waxy dent corn
- **SureFlex Hybrids**
- **High Mowing Organic Seeds**
- **Southern Exposure Seed Exchange**
- **True Leaf Market**
- **Borries Open Pollinated Seed Corn**
- **Pioneer**
- **Axis Seed**
- **Seed Consultants**
- **Dekalb**
- **Revere**
- **Beck's Hybrids**

## Soy Seed Suppliers

- **Albert Lea Seed**
  - Blue River Organic Seeds, Viking Non-GMO seed
- **PURIS**
  - Organic soybeans, Non-GMO soybeans, Natto & sprouting soybeans
- **Clarkson Grain**
  - Identity-preserved (traceable to US farms), non-GMO and organic
- **Brushvale Seed**
  - Identity-preserved (traceable to US farms), non-GMO soybeans
- **Pioneer**
- **Axis Seed**
- **Seed Consultants**
- **DeKalb**
- **Revere**
- **Beck's Hybrids**

## Wheat Seed Suppliers

- **True Leaf Market**
- **Albert Lea Seed**
- **Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds**
- **Millborn Seeds**
- **Sherck Seeds**
- **Mountain Valley Seed Company**
- **Plant Good Seed**
- **Wood Prairie Farms**
- **King's AgriSeeds**

# Alternatives to Neonic Seed Treatments

Moving away from neonicotinoid-treated seeds involves a shift from "preventative poisoning" to a system focused on soil health and targeted biological controls. Since neonicotinoids are systemic—meaning they permeate the entire plant—replacing them requires a multi-layered approach to protect the plant from the roots up.

## 1. Sourcing Untreated & Organic Seeds

The first step is finding "bare" or untreated seeds. Many commercial seeds are pre-coated by default, so you must specifically look for those labeled **Untreated**, **Organic**, or **Non-GMO**. (for more, see Seed Suppliers list attached)

<u>Seed Category</u>	<u>What to Look For</u>	<u>Trusted Suppliers</u>
<b>Vegetables &amp; Herbs</b>	Certified Organic / Untreated	<i>High Mowing Organic Seeds, Johnny's Selected Seeds, Baker Creek.</i>
<b>Field Crops (Corn/Soy)</b>	"Bare" seed (no coating)	<i>Albert Lea Seed, Fedco, Blue River Organic.</i>
<b>Native &amp; Wildflowers</b>	Open-pollinated / Wild-harvested	<i>Prairie Moon Nursery, Native Seeds/SEARCH.</i>

## 2. Non-Toxic "Coatings" & Seed Treatments

If you want to give seeds a boost without using neonics, you can apply biological treatments before planting:

- **Microbial Inoculants:** Products containing **Bacillus subtilis** or **Trichoderma** fungi protect the seed from soil-borne pathogens and encourage root growth, making the seedling more resilient to early-season pests.
- **Beneficial Nematodes:** These microscopic worms can be applied to the soil at planting. They seek out and kill soil-dwelling larvae like wireworms and grubs—the primary targets of neonic treatments.
- **Botanical Slurries:** For smaller scales, seeds can be dusted with **Diatomaceous Earth (DE)** or lightly coated in a **Neem oil** solution to deter chewing insects without harming pollinators later in the season.

## 3. Cultural & Ecological Strategies

In many cases, neonicotinoids are unnecessary if the planting environment is managed to disrupt pest cycles.

- **Delayed Planting:** Neonics are often used to protect seeds sitting in cold, wet soil. By waiting for slightly warmer soil (which speeds up germination), the plant spends less time in its "vulnerable" seedling stage where it is most prone to maggot and wireworm damage.
- **Crop Rotation:** Never plant the same crop family in the same spot two years in a row. This prevents soil-dwelling pests (like corn rootworm) from building up to dangerous levels.
- **Trap Cropping:** Plant a "decoy" crop that pests prefer. For example, planting Hubbard squash on the perimeter of a garden can lure cucumber beetles away from your main crops.
- **Increasing Biodiversity:** Planting floral "refuges" or hedgerows near your crops attracts the "good guys"—ladybugs, lacewings, and parasitic wasps—that provide free, natural pest control.

## 4. Why it Matters

Research from institutions like **Cornell University** and **Practical Farmers of Iowa** find that in many regions, neonicotinoid seed treatments provide **no significant yield benefit** for corn and soybeans, as the pests they target aren't always present in high enough numbers to justify the cost or the environmental damage to bees and birds and human health.