



## POPPING UP TROUBLE: PESTICIDE SEED COATINGS THREATEN BEES

**F**or many Americans, popcorn ranks high on the list of snack favorites and has unquestionably become a movie theater staple. Since the 1990s, roughly 1 billion pounds of unpopped popcorn have been sold annually in the United States and Americans consume roughly 16 billion quarts of popped popcorn every year.<sup>1</sup> But due to the soaring use of pesticide seed coatings, butter might not be the only thing coating this delicious snack.

### What else are you getting with that popcorn? Bee-toxic pesticides.

There are roughly 40 insecticides currently registered for use on popcorn, including 3 bee-toxic neonicotinoid chemicals: clothianidin, thiamethoxam, and imidacloprid.<sup>2</sup> While foliar and ground applications of these chemicals are common, the major concern for popcorn is the use of seed coatings. Between 79 and 100 percent of corn seed in the United States is coated with neonicotinoids (“neonics”), and popcorn is no exception.<sup>3</sup>

Seed coatings are a prevalent but relatively new method of applying pesticides to crops. The seed is covered with the pesticide or pesticide mixture (fungicide, herbicide, and insecticide combinations are common), allowing the chemicals to be taken up into the plant as it grows—ultimately rendering the whole plant toxic. Frighteningly, only about 5% of the active chemical pesticide on the seed coating

enters the plant, leaving the remaining 95% to enter the environment through seed dust or soil contamination and water runoff.<sup>4</sup> Despite the heavy use of seed coatings in agriculture, particularly on corn crops, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Environmental Protection Agency do not consider the planting of coated seeds to be a “pesticide application” and therefore do not track their usage—leading to widespread, unmonitored contamination across the United States.

### Orville Redenbeekiller? America's #1 popcorn brand should change its ways.

The extensive use of neonic seed coatings on popcorn is particularly alarming because of the chemical's document-





ed harm to pollinator species, like bees, that are vital to our food supply, agricultural economy, and environment.<sup>5</sup> That is why we are calling on Orville Redenbacher, the number one selling brand of popcorn in the United States, to source its popcorn from seeds that are NOT coated in these harmful chemicals.

Orville Redenbacher would not be alone in taking action to protect bees from neonics:

- In 2015, two of the largest popcorn brands in the world, Pop Secret and Pop Weaver, committed to phasing out the use of neonic coated seeds from their popcorn supply.
- To date, more than 4 million Americans have called on the government to take stronger actions to protect bees from toxic pesticides like neonics.
- In 2014, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced that their agency is banning neonicotinoid insecticides from being used on all wildlife refuges nationwide by January 2016.
- The European Union has a moratorium on the most toxic uses of neonics.
- The Province of Ontario, Canada plans to reduce the number of acres planted with neonicotinoid-coated corn and soybean seeds by 80 percent by 2017.

Despite these major victories and clear recognition of the threat to pollinator species, powerful pesticide companies leave farmers little to no choice as to whether or not to buy seeds coated with neonics. The market is set up to promote the use of the chemicals, regardless of need or consequence. That's why it is so critical for companies to support growers and demand access to seeds that are not coated in these toxic chemicals.

The impact of neonics on bees is just one example

of the harms caused by an agricultural system that is overly reliant on toxic pesticides. Phasing out neonics is an important step toward the larger goal of creating a sustainable and organic food future.

### Why Orville Redenbacher?

The popcorn seed market is dominated by three major companies: ConAgra foods, Weaver Popcorn Company, and Ag Alumni Seed. Weaver Popcorn Company and ConAgra are unique in that they supply the seeds, contract the farmers, process the seeds, and produce the product. Together the two vertically integrated companies share roughly two-thirds of the popcorn crop in the United States and they both have expanding international markets.<sup>6</sup> Orville Redenbacher is ConAgra's top selling popcorn brand (they also own Jiffy Pop, Act II, and Fiddle Faddle) and is also America's most recognizable popcorn brand. Orville Redenbacher is sold in over 30 movie theater chains—including AMC theaters, the second largest movie theater chain in the country.<sup>7</sup> Two of the largest popcorn companies in the world have already committed to phasing out bee-toxic pesticides and it is time for Orville Redenbacher to do the same.

As the largest popcorn company in the United States, with a market share of 28%,<sup>8</sup> ConAgra has the ability to not only become a leader in pollinator protection but to also influence its competitors in the popcorn seed market to do the same.

### Take Action!

Given the countless risks, lack of benefits, and widespread consumer demand for pollinator protection, Orville Redenbacher should join other industry leaders in committing to phase out the use of neonic-coated seeds for their popcorn products.

Visit our campaign website to sign the petition to Orville Redenbacher urging them to phase out neonic-coated popcorn seeds and protect bees:

[www.pollinatorsandyourplate.org](http://www.pollinatorsandyourplate.org)

## References

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