

# Bee researcher touts flower power

By **DON JENKINS**  
Capital Press

COUPEVILLE, Wash. — Researcher Tim Lawrence has been all around Washington state testing bee hives for neonicotinoids, a class of pesticides banned by the European Commission for their purported harm to honeybees.



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

**Washington State University research scientist Tim Lawrence shows a bee hive July 30 in Coupeville on Whidbey Island.**

Neonicotinoids in pollen and beeswax were almost non-existent in urban areas. More were detected in agricultural areas, but not enough to justify a ban, Lawrence said.

The Washington State University researchers expect to publish their findings soon in the Journal of Economic Entomology, adding to the body of knowledge on an emotional debate. So emotional, it's hindering an effective response to honeybee losses, Lawrence said. "I think the whole neonicotinoid issue is a huge, unnecessary distraction when looking at what's necessary for bees."

Neonicotinoids were introduced in the 1990s as alternatives to pesticides that were more harmful to birds and mammals. Critics say that because plants absorb neonicotinoids, bees in turn pick up the pesticide. The United Kingdom recently relaxed Europe's ban on neonicotinoids, sparking an angry backlash.

Lawrence says the anger is misplaced. To help bees, he stresses flower power.

"We need to plant lots of flowers. I mean acres and acres of flowers," he said.

## Wrangled bees

Lawrence, 64, has been thinking about what bees need since he was 12 years old. He saw bees swarming a tree limb, cut it down and carried it home to show his mother and announce his career plans.

As a young man, he wrangled bees in California and hammed it up by encouraging thousands of swarming bees to form a "beard" around his face. He also met his future wife, Susan Cobey, another young bee wrangler, who is now

a Washington State researcher and an authority on honeybee breeding.

Lawrence was a commercial beekeeper who later moved into academia, earning a Ph.D. in environmental science in his 50s at Ohio State University.

He took a post-doctorate job in Pullman as a bee researcher and seven months later, in 2010, was named director of the WSU Island County Extension Office, where he has continued his bee research.

## Mites, lack of forage bigger threats

Last year, he served on a honeybee task force convened by the Washington State Department of Agriculture. The task force concluded that parasitic varroa mites and lack of forage are bigger threats to honeybees than neonicotinoids.

The conclusion put the task force in step with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, but out of step with European regulators and some local governments, such as Olympia, which have banned neonicotinoids on public property.

Lawrence readily agrees that spraying neonicotinoids in the presence of bees is bad and that there can be an over-reliance on chemicals to control pests. He doesn't rule out the possibility that evidence supporting bans will come out and said that researchers should continue looking for new classes of pesticides easy on bees.

But he's unpersuaded that banning neonicotinoids is the answer for what ails honeybees, a position reinforced by his recent research.

Mark Emrich, president of the Washington State Beekeepers Association, read a draft of the soon-to-be-published paper. His hives in Thurston County were tested, and neonicotinoids were not found. Nevertheless, he remains concerned that widely used neonicotinoids are damaging bees' ability to function and maintain healthy hives.

"I'm more concerned about sub-lethal degradation of the bees as opposed to the bees actually dying," he said.

Emrich notes that other research has concluded neonicotinoids are harming bees. "Nobody has really given me a good synopsis on why all the stuff done before was wrong," he said.

Lawrence recalls shoveling piles of dead bees in the 1980s killed by ill-timed pesticide applications before neonicotinoids were introduced. The mass die-offs of bees have stopped, he said. "If they ban neonicotinoids, what are they going to replace them with? What are the consequences of that?"

# Study: GMO labels don't act as warnings

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**  
Capital Press

A new study concludes that shoppers aren't scared off by labels on food containing genetically modified organisms, but labeling opponents are skeptical of the findings.

The study by University of Vermont economics professor Jane Kolodinsky found that support for mandatory GMO labeling didn't measurably correspond with opposition to biotechnology.

"A label doesn't seem to change people's opinion of genetic engineering," she said.

The results were released at a time when GMO labels are in the public spotlight.

A proposal to ban state and local governments from requiring labels for GMOs is currently pending in Congress and Vermont's labeling law is being challenged before the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

## Strong support for labeling

An average of 89 percent of Vermont residents, who were surveyed five times between 2003 and 2015 as part of the study, favored mandatory GMO labeling.

About 60 percent of survey respondents said they opposed GMOs being used in commercial food products.

Among people who want labeling, those without college educations, those in single-parent households and those with the highest incomes tended not to oppose GMOs.

Support for labeling tended to increase GMO opposition among men and people with median incomes, but the overall impact of backing labels was

negligible to non-existent, the study found.

Kolodinsky said she was surprised by the results because opponents claim that GMO labels will act as warnings to consumers and reduce consumption of products containing biotech ingredients.

Given the study's findings, however, such fears are unfounded, she said.

## Scientists, public at odds

The Coalition for Safe and Affordable Food, which represents food manufacturers and farm groups opposed to GMO labeling, believes the study "conveniently overlooks" statements by anti-GMO advocates who tout labels as the first step in convincing the public to avoid biotech products.

The coalition pointed to a recent survey by the Pew Research Service that found the majority of scientists view GMOs as safe while the majority of the public does not.

"This is the result of a campaign of deception anti-GMO activists have been waging for years," the coalition said in statement. "A mandatory label will only serve to deepen this divide between perception and reality."

## Liberal-leaning state

Somin also questioned whether the survey sample was representative of the U.S. as a whole, since it was conducted in a liberal-leaning state that tends to be more skeptical of GMOs.

"Vermont is atypical in a number of well-known ways," he said.

While some people who support labels may not oppose GMOs, the labeling movement is generally embraced by people who oppose biotechnology, Somin said.

The Center for Food Safety, a nonprofit group that's critical of GMOs, believes labels will be useful for people who want to avoid them without unnecessarily alarming consumers.

"It doesn't come with an enormous stigma for the industry," said Colin O'Neil, the group's director of government affairs.

It's more likely that food manufacturers who have spent millions of dollars fighting GMO label campaigns in several states will cause fear of GMOs, he said.

Such efforts reinforce the idea that companies that rely on biotech ingredients have something to hide, O'Neil said. "What are these companies so afraid of?"

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