



Pollinator Stewardship Council

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USDA Must Protect Its Scientists

A recent article in *Reuters* (<http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/03/27/usda-petition-idUSL2N0WT1TQ20150327>) stated USDA scientists are being harassed and their work is being censored or suppressed, especially work related to insecticides and herbicides. The Pollinator Stewardship Council submitted a letter to the USDA Inspector General expressing concern for U.S. Department of Agriculture scientists. The USDA Inspector General's office should conduct a thorough investigation into this matter and take necessary steps to ensure the USDA maintains scientific integrity by not interfering with the valuable work of its scientists.

In March, the Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) filed a citizen [petition](#)ⁱ requesting the U.S. Department of Agriculture adopt new policies to increase job protection for government scientists who question the health and safety of agricultural chemicals. The petition urges the agency to adopt policies to specifically prevent the “political suppression or alteration of studies and lay out clear procedures for investigating allegations and of scientific misconduct.”

PEER found more than ten USDA scientists who have faced consequences or investigations, when their work called into question the health and safety of agricultural chemicals. These scientists documented clear actions that violated their scientific integrity, including:

- USDA officials retracting studies
- watering down findings
- removing scientists' names from authorship
- delaying approvals for publication of research papers.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has a responsibility to protect the health and safety of the American public, and ensure long-term viability and sustainability of the environment and our natural resources. The possibility the USDA is prioritizing the interests of the chemical industry over those of the American public is unacceptable. All the research the USDA conducts must maintain scientific integrity and transparency to ensure it is guiding science-based policy decisions.

Scientific evidence has implicated insecticides as a leading driver of honey bee declines, and herbicides as a leading driver of the destruction of pollinator habitat. Beekeepers, honey producers, and the crops pollinated by managed and native pollinators rely on USDA scientists to protect the health of our food supply. Honey bees and native bees pollinate one third of the human diet. For a sustainable and affordable food supply pollinators are key to crop yields, affordable food, and diverse nutritious food.

The USDA must maintain scientific integrity, and not allow harassment, censorship or suppression of science-based findings. The Pollinator Stewardship Council urges the USDA Inspector General to take the necessary steps to ensure USDA maintains scientific integrity in the protection of the health and safety of the American public. For more information and to support scientific integrity of USDA scientists go to [USDA Must Support Its Scientists](#).

¹ Ruch, Jeff. Petition for Rulemaking United States Department of Agriculture. 26 March 2015. http://www.peer.org/assets/docs/usda/3_26_15_USDA_%20Rule-Making_Petition.pdf