

## Q&A from Pesticides & the Chesapeake Bay Conference November 19, 2020 – Day 2 Session

*Some questions were answered live and those answered below were typed in by presenters.*

**Asker:** Luke

**Question:** I've been receiving requests from an environmental group to sign on to a letter for President elect Biden that objects to his choice of Mr. Vilsack for USDA secretary due to his history as a 'lobbyist for big ag', etc. Do you have an opinion on how his tenure at the USDA might be good or bad for the environment?

**Jay Feldman Answer:** Live answer

**Asker:** Stewart

**Question:** Do you think US can go 100% organic farming or should there be a mix?

**Jay Feldman Answer:** There is no reason why we can't transition agriculture to 100% organic practices. The knowledge and experience is there in the nearly \$60 billion organic sector. We just need to make the commitment as a nation and support farmer transition.

**Asker:** Ana

**Question:** What is the best argument to reticent politicians to move in this direction?

**Jay Feldman Answer:** We focus on the science (adverse effects information across the board, both health and environmental), and the viability of alternatives, including their cost-effectness.

**Asker:** Richard

**Question:** Does politics influence science more than science influence politics?

**Jay Feldman Answer:** As you know, agencies are lead by political appointees. So, it is often the case that the politics drive the science. We have seen this on chlorpyrifos and other pesticides. I think that we are learning with Covid-19 that science is critical to policy and we have heard discussion recently that the policy will be driven by science. We need to take that example and apply it across the board to health and environmental policy.

**Asker:** V K

**Question:** How do you address the argument conventional farmers would use, that without chemicals the yield would drop significantly?

**Jay Feldman Answer:** Yes, a transition will take resources to assist farmers and build soil health. We need to get started in a much more serious way. We see this a essential to solving these problems ultimately.

**Asker:** cpbraver

**Question:** Many states looking at what farming practices sequester carbon are leery of recognizing the power of organic crop production because it goes against the nation's current predominant ag production model. How can we enlist the scientific community to share the science in a more compelling way, get the public engaged, and direct additional research funds?

**Jay Feldman Answer:** It is a question of building a strong coalition with support from farmers, scientists, and those in the organic industry. We really can leverage these groups advance a

systemic solution. Finding leadership and provide support is certainly critical to success. Changing the status quo is never easy, of course, but the data on harm associated with chemical-intensive agriculture and the data on the viability of organic and its benefits makes a compelling case.

**Asker:** Anonymous

**Question:** How will we get past the blockade of the MD Dept of Agriculture?

**Jay Feldman Answer:** The Department may represent the status quo because the current politics may demand this. We should try to work with MDA, but at the end of the day, we need to work with policy leaders and can help to build the pressure to ensure that publicly supported agencies follow the science. So much of this becomes increased understanding of the viability of a systemic solution.

**Asker:** Arthur

**Question:** Why are businesses allowed to use chlorpyrifos without limits?

**Bonnie Raindrop Answer:** They shouldn't be. which is why EPA ruled to ban it nationally until that decision was overturned. Politics and corporate influence all too often puts industry profits above public safety. This is why citizens must unite and put their support behind passing state and federal legislation that protects people, the Bay, wildlife and the environment from millions of pounds of poisons being dumped annually into our environment and food.

**Asker:** Ana

**Question:** Are the bees recovering?

**Bonnie Raindrop Answer:** Nationally no, the 2019-20 stats showed 2nd highest loss annually and highest loss ever in summer—which is when bees should thrive. In Maryland, we have gained ground with less losses this year at around 35%—we were at 42%. Unfortunately neonicotinoids persist in woody plants and trees to be expressed with a 7 year half life. And people are planting more healthy habitat which is a plus.

**Asker:** Stuart

**Question:** Is data on health cost to state and local govt. of migrant sickness available?

**Virginia Ruiz Answer:** There is a dearth of data on these costs to both workers and to local government. One problem is that health data often does not include occupational information. Also, illness is underreported because workers are often reluctant or unable to access medical care due to many factors.

**Asker:** Ana

**Question:** How can the public better help you?

**Virginia Ruiz Answer:** Thanks Ana. At a basic level, you can keep abreast of some of these issues by checking the Marylanders for Food & Farm Workers facebook page and support our efforts to urge state and local leaders to protect these vulnerable communities

**Asker:** D'Williams

**Question:** How do you sign up for the talks you mentioned?

**Virginia Ruiz Answer:** More information is on the Facebook page, on the upcoming events link <https://www.facebook.com/MDFoodAndFarmWorkerProtection/events>

**Asker:** Margie

**Question:** Are farmworkers more vulnerable to antibiotic-resistant infection?

**Virginia Ruiz Answer:** There is some research that suggests increasing vulnerability among farmworkers and especially livestock/poultry workers. This blog post from Migrant Clinicians Network has more information <https://www.migrantclinician.org/blog/2019/jul/antibiotics-orange-groves-resistance-masses-unknown-health-consequences-farmworkers.ht>

**Asker:** D'Williams

**Question:** How do you get onto the workgroups?

**Virginia Ruiz Answer:** You can connect via our Facebook page by sending a message through that page, or you can email Lily Hawkins at Food & Water Watch at [lhawkins@fwwatch.org](mailto:lhawkins@fwwatch.org)