

## Testimony for the NH hearings, January 13th, 2026

My name is Louis Robert, I am an agronomist, grain crops specialist and have worked with the Department of Agriculture in the Province of Québec, Canada, for 33 years. Since my retirement from the Department in 2022, I have worked as a private consultant. I took an active role in the process leading to the elimination of neonicotinoids in the province of Quebec.

Prior to the implementation of the regulation, from the spring of 2019, all but the organic corn grown in Québec and about 50 % of the soybeans were planted with neonicotinoid-treated seed, adding up to about 2 M acres. By 2021, less than 0,5 % was so treated.

From my standpoint, there are 3 main factors that made this possible: 1) results from sound public-funded research; 2) growing public awareness; and 3) regulations put in place by the Department of Environment.

Seed suppliers reacted very quickly to adapt to this regulatory change, knowing that this was going to happen in advance. As early as the spring of 2019, most corn and soybean seed suppliers switched from neonics to diamides as an optional insecticide seed coating. Business being business, they soon began offering their customers what their customers wanted and that was seed untreated with insecticides. Seed untreated with insecticides, went from the research plots and extended to hundreds of thousands of acres. Despite rumours and scary threats from the industry and farmers unions, yields never changed, peaking in 2024 with a record bumper crop.

Apart from a few cases in the spring of 2019, hardly anybody had any difficulty sourcing non-neonic treated seeds and many were not even aware of the change. A saving of around \$10-\$15 for each bag of non-treated corn seed was sometimes transferred to the farmer. In many instances however, the supplier did not adjust the price.

Prior to those regulatory initiatives, word had already spread around that insecticide-treated seeds may not bring any advantages to Québec farmers, at least among crop advisers and top cash croppers. Dr. Geneviève Labrie led a large research project carried out from 2012 through 2016 (5 cropping seasons) in 7 different regions, which found no significant difference in yield between treated and untreated plots of corn and soybeans across all sites and years.

Continued monitoring of about 1000 sites confirms that main soil pests (wireworms and seedcorn maggot) are below economic thresholds in 92% of cases in Québec, with no damage to seedlings, regardless of whether seeds were neonic-treated, diamide-treated, or not treated at all. Dr. Labrie's findings are consistent with other studies conducted in the U.S. and Canada. The research also showed that those thresholds are conservative, i.e. you may find a fairly large number of bugs on a given field and yet never see a yield change.

On January 24th, 2019, I was fired for having leaked an internal memo to the press. In that memo, I warned the deputy minister of the interference that the industry exerted to prevent the publication of Dr Labrie's research about the uselessness of insecticide-coated seed. An inquiry by the Auditor General later that year publicly cleared me and, following official apologies from secretary of Agriculture André Lamontagne, and Prime Minister François Legault, I was re-installed at my position in August, 2019.

Nowadays, everyone in Quebec acknowledges the effectiveness of the regulation in bringing down the use of neonics and, as a result, the Dept of Environment extended the “verification of need” requirement to all seed insecticides, effective for the 2026 season. All corn hybrids and soybean varieties are now sold insecticide-free, unless you put in a special order and provide justification for its requirement to the Department of Environment, which very few will bother to do.

To this day, research shows that the targeted pests have never been a real problem, and that we had been using highly toxic ineffective compounds for too long.

*Louis Robert, agronomist*