Marketing Munchies Podcast Transcript
Bee Friendly

Dr. Bridget Behe: Welcome back to this episode of the Marketing Munchies Podcast. Today I'd like to talk a little bit about bees and neonicotinoids. We all know that bees, particularly honey bees, have been in decline for some time. This has been as a result of a convergence of factors including loss of habitat, loss of food sources, and the use of insecticides. Despite the prevalence of the topic in the media, we were interested to understand general consumer perceptions about bees and neonicotinoid use, especially in light of some of the box stores requiring that their growers no longer use neonicotinoids. We published a study that was conducted back in 2014. We collected data in May 2014 and this particular paper was called *Consumer Preferences for Traditional Neonicotinoid Free, Bee Friendly, or Biological Control for Pest Management Practices on Floriculture Crops*. I will put a link to the article in the transcript (http://connect-2-consumer.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Consumer-Preferences-for-Bee-friendly.pdf).

Back in May 2014, Dr. Kristin Getter, Heidi Wollaeger and I put together an online survey and we were interested to understand how much consumers knew about neonicotinoids and what specifically their perceptions were about labels that indicated plants were grown without the use of neonicotinoids. We actually created three separate surveys. One of them contained indoor plants and two of them had outdoor plants. Now we know that we shouldn't find very many bees indoors but we wanted to understand if consumers understood the fact that indoor house plants that could be treated with neonicotinoids really would pose no risk to bees.

We collected slightly over 3,000 responses during May of 2014 and I want to share with you some of the key findings. Now not everyone had purchased a flowering plant. We had about 65% of our participants who purchased a house plant for indoor use or an outdoor flowering plant in the 12 months prior to the study. We also had a mix of locations from which our subjects had purchased plants. 59% of them had made a purchase from a home improvement or hardware store, 44% from an independent free-standing garden center, 30% from a mass merchandiser, and 22% from a supermarket or grocery store.

What we were really interested in was their knowledge of pest control terminology. We first asked them some free-form questions, to give their responses to an open-ended question. About 35% believed correctly that bee friendly pest management practices were not harmful to bees but almost a fifth of them believed that bee friendly meant the plant was attractive to bees. They seem to be confusing the pest management strategy with the fact that pollinators use plants as food sources. When we asked them to describe what neonicotinoid free meant, more than half, 56% reported that they did not understand what that term meant or couldn't define it. 48% of our participants reported that traditional insect management was pest control using insecticides or pesticides.

We thought we might find some differences between the participants who had purchased plants and those who didn't but we actually found relatively few differences in their perceptions about what bee friendly meant and what neonicotinoid free meant. There wasn't a lot of distinction there between people who already are buying our products and people who are not. We showed them photographs or images of different types of plants that were treated with different insect management strategies and had different price points and what we found was that most people make their decision by what the plant type was or what the genus was. This is consistent with other prior research we've done. The insect management strategy was the second most important to mention and that was followed by price.

Within the production type or insect management strategy, the most highly valued was bee friendly and that was followed by neonicotinoid free and that was followed by the use of beneficial insects. There actually was a negative or a detraction of value for use of traditional pest management strategies. When we used the difference in price and the value that people placed on the different insect management strategy method, we actually found that a bee friendly labeled plant could capture anywhere from $0.96 to $2.10 more than plants grown with traditional pest management strategies. We do see greater value in use of the term bee friendly over the use of the term neonicotinoid free.

We'll delve into the topic a little bit further in subsequent podcasts but the conclusion for this particular podcast is that the use of bee friendly on a label is going to garner a higher profit margin than the use of the term neonicotinoid free. Most consumers really didn't understand what that terminology meant. They didn't understand what neonicotinoids were but they did have some accurate, and some inaccurate, but mostly accurate perceptions about bee friendly pest management strategies.

My next guest next week is going to be Dr. Hayk Khachatryan from the University of Florida and we'll talk about the subject just a little bit more.

Thanks for listening!