**The Town of Middleton and the 2019 Neonic Sunflower Field**

In 2017, when the Friends hosted Sunflower Days, the question was asked whether the sunflower seeds were treated with neonicotinoids—a class of insecticides effective against sap-feeding insects such as aphids and chemically related to nicotine. The chemical is taken up into the plant itself.

The Friends began asking questions about neonics and if the seeds were treated with the chemical. They found that the answer was yes. At the time, the question was, “Do neonicotinoid-treated seeds harm pollinators?” The Friends discovered that this was a huge topic, with hundreds of related studies going on around the world, generating opinions on both sides of the question. The Friends sought advice from people who might enlighten them in their quest for answers. They decided to gather some pollen and have a lab examine it to see if chemical residue could be detected. The good news was that no residue was detected, but the bad news was that this exercise was far from scientific, and proved inconclusive.

Over the last two years, major studies concerning the impact of neonicotinoid-treated plants on pollinators have been completed. One of those studies was carried out by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). Its conclusion (as well as that of many other studies), is that neonicotinoid seed treatment is harmful to pollinators. In April of 2018, Europe banned three main neonicotinoid chemicals for outdoor use (two of which are used on the sunflowers at Pope Farm Conservancy). Canada is also considering banning these products. Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Vermont have also begun the process of restricting certain classes of neonics. The EPA has cancelled 12 registrations for neonicotinoid pesticides (out of 59). Clearly, in the last couple of years, science has made great strides in understanding this problem.

The Friends of Pope Farm Conservancy have been following the progress of this science. In the spring of 2019, the Friends were concerned that the Town would consider planting seeds treated with neonicotinoid chemicals. The Friends approached the Town of Middleton and talked with the Town Administrator about neonics and the potential harm to pollinators. They informed the town that there had been complaints about this, and given new evidence about the harmful effects caused by neonicotinoids, it could be a problem.

The Town planted treated seeds. So, at Pope Farm Conservancy we have a Prairie Restoration featuring pollinator plants across the trail from a neonic sunflower field that harms those same pollinators. It is environmentally reprehensible.