Pollinators matter to U.S. soybean farmers

U.S. soy farmers understand the economic and ecological importance of pollinators. Without them, agriculture would collapse. Around 75%[1] of agricultural crops we grow—including apples, cherries, broccoli and brussels sprouts—benefit from pollinators—even some that are traditionally self-pollinating.

POLLINATOR PRACTICES

Pollinators include a wide variety of species—such as bees, butterflies, birds and bats—and contribute approximately $200 billion[3] in total ecological value each year. That's why it's so concerning that honeybees, a key pollinator, have seen a sharp decline in recent years.

The value of honeybees came into focus a few years ago as several factors contributed to a decline in their population. Scientists say there isn't one single cause of pollinator decline, but more likely a variety of factors that impact each other.

The 3 greatest concerns for bees are:

1. Pests and pathogens
2. Pesticide exposure
3. Loss of habitat

Extensive remediation efforts, from well-funded research projects to community pollinator gardens, were initiated. U.S. soybean farmers joined the response by taking significant steps to protect pollinators:

1. **Working with neighbors who cultivate and manage bees or maintain pollinator habitats:** Concerned and interested citizens have begun adding bees and pollinator habitats to their homestead and farm operations, so neighboring soybean farmers are working with them to avoid spraying in areas where pollinator populations are protected.

2. **Targeting and timing sprays:** Using appropriate application equipment and responsible management, soybean farmers eliminate pesticide spray drift and ensure that nearby pollinator habitats are not disturbed. Because pollinators are most plentiful in and around fields when soybeans and surrounding plants are in bloom, farmers time their spray applications for those times that pollinators are least likely to be working the field.

3. **Applying the correct pesticides:** By scouting their crops for insect populations, following label instructions and understanding which pesticides are less toxic to bees, soybean farmers choose products that are most appropriate to use on their farm with the least impact on pollinators.

4. **Enrolling in conservation programs:** The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Conservation Reserve Program has provided millions of acres of habitat for bees and other pollinators through incentivizing legume forages and diverse wildflower plantings.

These valuable insects provide a service that boosts harvest size and quality, increases efficiency in terms of production per acre, and drives the global food supply. U.S. soybean farmers recognize their value and make every effort to grow the safest crop while protecting the world food supply for generations to come. Their work to ensure careful, efficient pesticide use protects the ecosystem and helps ensure sustainable soy production.

2.8 MILLION+ **HONEYBEE HIVES CURRENTLY IN THE U.S.**

Thanks to increased emphasis on pollinator health, the U.S. currently has more than 2.8 million honeybee hives and has had no reports of colony collapse disorder (attributed to stress on honeybees) in several years. This effort protects the roughly $18 billion in added revenue that pollinators contribute to the ag economy each year.[2]

By protecting pollinators, U.S. Soy farmers help to maintain healthy ecosystems. It also contributes to the U.S. Soy farmers long-term impact towards many of the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), especially SDG 2—Zero Hunger. Specifically, SDG Target 2.4, says, "*By 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and **implement resilient agricultural practices** that increase **productivity** and production, that help **maintain ecosystems**, that strengthen capacity for **adaptation to climate change**, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that **progressively improve land and soil quality.***"

[1] Margetta, Rob, and Tara Catherine Brackin. "Pollinator Biodiversity." NSF, July 5, 2018. https://www.nsf.gov/discoveries/disc_summ.jsp?cntn_id=295868&org=NSF.

[2] Nowierski, Robert. "Pollinators at a Crossroads." USDA, July 29, 2021. https://www.usda.gov/media/blog/2020/06/24/pollinators-crossroads.

[3] U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2024, June 5). The value of birds and bees. Farmers.gov. https://www.farmers.gov/blog/value-birds-and-bees.

About The U.S. Soybean Export Council (USSEC)

Soybeans are the United States' No. 1 food and agricultural export. The U.S. Soybean Export Council (USSEC) is focused on building preference, improving the value, and enabling market access for the use of U.S. Soy for human consumption, aquaculture, and livestock feed in 90 countries across the world. USSEC is a dynamic partnership of U.S. soybean producers, processors, commodity shippers, merchandisers, allied agribusinesses, and agricultural organizations; and connects food and agriculture industry leaders through a robust membership program. USSEC is farmer-funded by checkoff funds invested by the United Soybean Board, various state soybean councils, the food and agriculture industry, and the American Soybean Association's investment of cost-share funding provided by U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS). To learn more, visit www.ussec.org and www.ussoy.org, and engage with us on USSEC's LinkedIn, X, Facebook, and U.S. Soy's LinkedIn, X, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

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