

## Advertisement

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# Native pollinators create a buzz in Orange County

## Key Points

- Cost-benefit analyses in progress to show how pollinator promotion boosts yields.
- UC Davis will show how native pollinators boost pollination options.
- Last year, farmers established 60,000 acres of native pollinator habitat.

By EDITH MUNRO

**C**ALIFORNIA growers can tap into new information resources and several USDA programs to incorporate native bee habitat in their conservation efforts, according to bee experts speaking at a Native Pollinators in Agriculture field day in Orange County.

Cost-benefit analysis projects are getting under way to quantify how pollinator promotion can benefit yields of crops like almonds, apples, blueberries, and squash, according to Mace Vaughan, pollinator program director for the Xerces Society.

Good data already demonstrate that California hedgerows support native bee populations, Vaughan reported, noting that farmers across the country are incorporating pollinator habitat into their conservation practices.

For growers, the greatest need has been for practical “how-to” information on encouraging native pollinators.

## Customized information

“We are working with Natural Resources Conservation Service [NRCS] conservation grants to develop Xerces installation guides customized for different agricultural conditions,” Vaughan said. “Right now the California guides are out for final review, but even in rough draft form they are good enough to use.”

At the University of California, Davis, Neal Williams, assistant professor of entomology, is also working on practical guidance for growers.

“We are looking at what it will take to count on native pollinators to diversify the pollination options farmers have. We definitely have plants that are highly attractive, that grow well and persist well for people to try,” Williams said. “Where we still have to go is to demonstrate the increase in pollination services.”

His work targets farm-scale steps that growers can take on their own to increase native pollinator populations.

“We look for California native species to create a palette of plants that is drought-tolerant, attracts a diversity of pollinator species and provides bloom throughout the growing season. We also want pollinator-preferred plants with reliable growth and available seed. We want them to be pest-neutral or even pest-negative [not harboring pests], and we want the plants themselves to be nonweedy,” he explained.

**NEW PURPOSE:** Irvine Ranch, a former avocado grove destroyed by fire, now houses a native plant project that produces seed for native California plants to supply bee habitat restoration projects.



**NATIVE BEES:** Mace Vaughan, pollinator program director for the Xerces Society, captures native bee specimens at the Irvine Ranch project.



**AG LEADER:** A.G. Kawamura (left), former California secretary of agriculture, explains some of his native pollinator initiatives for a KVIE-TV interview in front of vegetable plantings at Orange County Great Park. Kawamura is co-chairman of the Native Pollinators in Agriculture Working Group.



**BEE DIVERSITY:** These are three different kinds of bees. All were captured from one wild sunflower plant at the Irvine Ranch Conservancy Native Plant Project.

Growers don't have to sacrifice productive land to pollinator habitat, according to Mike Omeg, an Oregon cherry grower who attended the field day. Omeg began installing habitat in 2006, concentrating on plantings along road banks, fencerows and other areas that would normally revert to weed patches.

## Pollinator habitat trend

U.S. farmers have established an estimated 60,000 acres of native pollinator habitat within the past few years, in part because of USDA initiatives under the Conservation Reserve Program, or CRP. Under the CRP CP42 pollinator enhancement practices, growers who incorporate pollinator conservation efforts can earn higher CRP rents.

Pollinator initiatives can also qualify for cost-sharing under USDA's Environmental Quality Incentives Program, or EQIP.

In California, habitat demonstration projects, meadows, and dozens of miles of hedgerows designed for pollinators and other beneficial insects have been planted across the state, with NRCS support.

Xerces' California guides — subdivided into versions for Southern California, the Central Coast and the Central Valley — and additional information are available on the internet at [www.xerces.org/pollinator-resource-center](http://www.xerces.org/pollinator-resource-center).

Munro writes from Windsor Heights, Iowa.

