

## The Buzz About Bees: Let's Protect Our Pollinators



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Pumpkins are just one of the crops that rely on insect pollination – primarily honeybees. In North America, about 30 percent of our food supply depends on honeybee pollination. In your own garden, you get more and bigger cucumbers, asparagus, carrots, squash and melons because of honeybees.

Wisconsin apple growers would lose as much as 80 percent of their crop without honeybees. In 2012, that would have meant a \$10.7 million loss to those growers. Door County cherries would decline by 60 percent; producers would have lost \$1.13 million in 2012. And without placing hives in the cranberry marshes, our growers would lose three-quarters of their cranberry crop – a \$173 million loss using 2012 prices. Not only would that be a big disappointment to us here in Wisconsin, but the rest of the nation and world would miss our cranberries – we produce more than any other state.

When you see all those jack o' lanterns come Halloween, thank our beekeepers and their honeybees.

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**Apple growers depend on honeybees to pollinate their crop.**



**A honeybee approaches an apricot flower.**

Losing those high-value fruit crops would mean a loss of jobs, too – our cranberry industry alone provides more than 7,000 jobs.

Of course, honey bees don't mean to pollinate plants. It just happens as they collect pollen and nectar to feed themselves. In 2012, Wisconsin apiaries harvested 4.35 million pounds of honey, worth \$8.87 million.

Nationwide, bees pollinate more than 90 crops. Pollination services offered by migratory beekeepers are worth \$19 billion annually, and the honey harvest is worth another \$286 million.



**A wild bee.**

So that old cliché about busy bees turns out to be true. Besides domesticated honey bees, there are species of wild bees that pollinate plants, too. They all need our help so they can keep on helping us.



**Colony collapse disorder has affected many beekeepers.**

percent of their hives. There is no single or definitive diagnosis or cause. Many factors appear to be acting in concert: poor nutrition, inadequate forage, pesticides, lack of genetic diversity in bees, viruses, and parasites.

Research is a lengthy process, and it's a process that largely plays out beyond the reach of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. We do work closely with the University of Wisconsin, both the agricultural colleges and the Extension, and will continue to do so. There are other measures that my department does take to help protect pollinators:

- We employ a state apiarist who oversees our hive inspection program. Migratory beekeepers must have their hives inspected before moving them to other states – mostly California, Texas and Florida. But we also conduct free inspections of hives for any of our beekeepers, whether they are commercial or hobbyists.
- We offer participation in Driftwatch™ for beekeepers and growers of sensitive crops like fruits and organics. Driftwatch™ provides a website where beekeepers can give notice of where their hives are, and crop farmers can list their acreage. Pesticide applicators check this site before applying pesticides, and take extra measures to prevent drift that could harm bees or sensitive crops.
- We regulate pesticide use in Wisconsin. Beyond EPA product registration, we require companies to register their products with us before than can distribute or use them in Wisconsin. We also certify and license pesticide applicators. Certification requires passing a written, closed-book exam, which covers protection of pollinating insects.



**Bees are very sensitive to pesticides.**

We'll keep on doing what we can to protect pollinators, beekeepers, our food supply and our agriculture. And as you enjoy the fruits of the harvest this autumn, when you carve that pumpkin or bite into that cranberry muffin, thank a beekeeper and thank a pollinator.

– A DATCP commentary from Ben Brancel, Secretary of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection released 9/27/2013

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**Additional Information:**

- Introduction to Pollination — an online learning module for MGVs at [wimastergardener.org/sites/wimastergardener.org/files/training/MG%20Pollination/Introduction%20to%20Pollination.htm](http://wimastergardener.org/sites/wimastergardener.org/files/training/MG%20Pollination/Introduction%20to%20Pollination.htm).