



# Where Would We BEE Without Pollinators?

Soil and Water Stewardship Week

April 26 – May 3, 2020

Puns can be funny. A declining bee and pollinator population is not.

According to the Kansas Rural Center, pollinators and other beneficial insects are losing ground worldwide. Currently, 25 percent of North American bee species are at risk of extinction.

Why is this important? To begin with, pollination is one of the most fundamental processes sustaining agriculture and natural ecosystems, and most native plants in North America require pollination by insects. Furthermore, pollinators are essential for productive agricultural ecosystems, such as row crop production and agro-forestry, and they ensure the production of fruit and seeds in many crops, grasses, and timber. Likewise, pollinators play a significant role in natural rangeland ecosystems by helping to keep plant communities healthy and reproducing.

It is quite simple. We need pollinators to support rangelands for our wildlife and livestock, to keep our forests productive, and to keep the agricultural crops that we use every day growing.

In Texas, most plant pollination is carried out by bees. The first thing that comes to mind is probably the honeybee. Rightly so, as honeybee hives collapse, and population decreases have been in the headlines for many years. And while honeybees do have an important role to play, they are actually a non-native species that originated in Europe. We cannot neglect our native bee species, whose population is also decreasing.

Bumblebees, mason bees, mining bees, sunflower bees, and squash bees, just to name a few, are native to Texas. These native bees are not only crucial to the survival of our natural ecosystems, they have even been proven to be more efficient pollinators for many agricultural crops.

While there are many theories as to what is causing the decline of bee populations, what can be done to prevent further losses? One solution is soil conservation. Improving soil health with less tillage, planting multispecies cover crops that work in your area, and implementing crop rotations can over time build organic matter in the soil, lead to less pesticide and herbicide use, and incorporate the plant diversity that bees need to flourish. Grazing management, with proper rotation and rest, can enhance and restore the diverse plant communities and habitats that are essential for the native bee species.

The Dust Bowl was a wake-up call in the early 1930s that led to the formation of local Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) in Texas. Since then, landowners have worked with SWCDs to get voluntary conservation practices on the ground. The decreasing bee population in Texas and the United States is today's wake-up call. We need pollinators, and we also need good stewards that will implement pollinator-friendly conservation practices to protect and preserve the natural resources of Texas.

The good news is that we know the way. Proper land stewardship always makes the difference. Don't BEE afraid of conservation, *because if we lose pollinators, we do not have a Plan BEE.*

**PROPER LAND STEWARDSHIP ALWAYS MAKES THE DIFFERENCE.**



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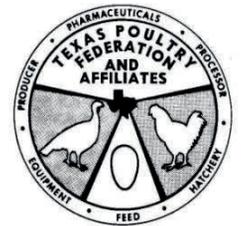
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