

"Recent changes in agriculture have brought the honey bee prominently to public attention. It is the only insect useful for pollination whose numbers can be controlled. The prosperity of the beekeeper thus becomes of vital public interest. Until recently little attention has been given to planting for bee pasture."¹

Excerpts from 'Plants Useful for Bee Pasture', Frank C. Pellet, *Economic Botany*, 1947

Bee Friendly Farming

Kathy Kellison

My name is Kathy Kellison, and I'm the executive director of a shoestring nonprofit I founded three years ago called Partners for Sustainable Pollination (PFSP). PFSP is an organization dedicated to improving the health of honey bees in pollination services. We work with beekeepers, scientists, government agencies, growers and other land managers. We are primarily focused on identifying, increasing, and enhancing bee forage in the U.S., which is commonly understood to be a limiting factor on bee health and the beekeeping industry.

If someone had asked me three years ago what EQIP, WHIP, CRP, CSP, FSA, NRCS, or a dozen other alphabet soup acronyms stand for or what their purposes are, I would have been at a loss for an explanation. I now know they are all important parts of the infrastructure to help willing growers create habitat or critical forage for honey bees through government programs authorized in the Farm Bill and funded by Congress.

At the time of PFSP's very humble beginnings, there were two other established pollinator-advocacy organizations: NAPP (North American Pollinator Protection Campaign) and Xerces (The Society for the Conservation of Invertebrates). Neither included in their missions devoting energy to honey bees. However, with the continued decline of honey bees and the unexplained phenomenon of CCD, now both organizations formally collaborate with beekeeping leadership.

The work of PFSP falls into one of four categories:

- Collaboration with scientists, growers, beekeepers, and other pollinator advocacy stakeholders to promote best management practices in agriculture to minimize harm to honey bees and other pollinators;
- Contribute recommendations on honey bee/pollinator issues to regulatory agencies including EPA, USDA/NRCS, APHIS, & CDFA;
- Provide outreach to growers by coordinating workshops to raise awareness about the challenges faced by pollinators – especially honey bees and beekeepers, and how land management options can affect pollinator health; and
- To foster consumer awareness and support for improving honey bee health through participation in the 'Bee Friendly Farming' initiative.

When I began this work, I knew almost nothing about

politics, the beekeeping industry, or advocacy work, and not very much about bee biology either. I am deeply indebted to generous, experienced, and talented individuals like Randy Oliver, Gene Brandi, Eric Mussen, Robbin Thorp, and Marla Spivak, among many others, who have somehow made time in their jammed lives to mentor and advise me at every step of the way.

Much of my time initially was spent attending various conferences organized by ABF, AHPA, or NAPP, so that the leaders in those organizations could get to know me. I first met Gene Brandi testifying in opposition to AB 771, the bee exclusion legislation proposed to satisfy the Seedless Mandarin Growers. I now proudly serve on the Board of Directors for California State Beekeepers Association. |



The one glaring realization that has been a constant is the gross disparity between current government regulations and the challenges faced by bees (and beekeepers) meeting pollination demands. This led me to conclude that in order to improve bee health, what is needed is widespread education on these issues.

I often hear from beginning beekeepers "Yeah, my grandfather was a beekeeper," or "I remember my grandfather keeping bees," etc. Because of the relatively rapid transition peaking in the 50s and 60s from smaller family farms to larger and fewer farms,² the craft of beekeeping has greatly diminished. With the introduction of the Varroa mite, bee husbandry has become more difficult, and, for some, less appealing as a profession. Dennis vanEnglesdorp refers to 'Nature Disconnect Disorder' when addressing audiences on the topic of CCD, and this is exactly the point. In large measure, most citizens have lost connection with one of the simplest and most crucial of biological mechanisms – pollination. Just a generation or two ago, much of the knowledge now acquired in high school biology would have been learned growing up on a farm.

The CCD event has precipitated an unprecedented deluge of scientific inquiries into bee pathogens and chemical residues which have greatly increased our understanding of bee health issues. What we do know is that lack of good pollen forage in the bees' diet decreases their immunocompetence,³ and makes them more susceptible to diseases, pests, and pesticide exposures.⁴

Beekeepers are dependent upon land that they do not own to pasture their bees. The reduced ratio of open land to developed land limits the number of colonies that

beekeepers can nurture. Awareness needs to be raised about the need to provide sufficient habitat to support the number of healthy colonies required to meet pollination requirements.

This all led to the recent creation of the Bee Friendly Farming™ (BFF) Program and the trademarking of the BFF logo. The program is open to citizens from all walks of life who want to help, including farmers, ranchers, school groups, local governments, and especially beekeepers to help raise public awareness about pollinator habitat needs and to encourage consumers and businesses to reward bee friendly growers and local beekeepers by purchasing farm products bearing the BFF logo.

The goals of BFF are:

- Enable consumers to support growers who are utilizing best-practice management for bees on their working lands by purchasing produce bearing the BFF logo;
- Augment cost-share assistance to growers with the fees collected from participants;
- Raise awareness about the challenges beekeepers face to meet the dietary needs for healthy bees through the networking of the BFF logo;
- Increase habitat for all bees and pollinators; and
- Educate growers and landowners to be aware of pollinators when applying pesticides.

Anyone wishing to help our honey bees and other pollinators can take the following actions:

- Thank BFF-certified growers by purchasing local produce and bearing the BFF logo;
- Become BFF-certified at

www.pfspbees.org/selfcert.htm and use the BFF logo in your own efforts to spread the word; the form is also available at

www.BeeCulture.com. Click on the BFF logo;

- Plant bee-beneficial forage plants on your farm, in your backyard garden and on school grounds, parks and other public lands;
- Be aware of pollinators when applying pesticides; and
- Invite beekeepers to place their hives on your land if you have safe bee forage.

Beekeepers can also help in two other important ways – by encouraging growers to participate in the BFF Program, and by becoming BFF-certified and displaying the BFF logo on their own websites. **BC**

Kathy Kellison is the coordinator of Bee Friendly Farming, and lives in northern California.

Sources:

- ¹Plants Useful For Bee Pasture, Frank C. Pellett, Field Editor, American Bee Journal
 - ²Toward a Sustainable Agriculture, Jon Hanson, John Hendrickson, 2009
 - ³Diet effects on honeybee immunocompetence, Cedric Alaux, Francois Ducioz, Didier Crauser and Yves Le Conte, Biology Letters, 2010
 - ⁴A historical review of managed honey bee populations in Europe and the United States and the factors that may affect them, Dennis vanEngelsdorp, Marina Doris Meixner, Journal of Invertebrate Pathology, 2009
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