Pollinators in Peril?

Pollinators is the current buzzword. At the capitol in St. Paul, at the capitol in Washington, D.C., in the local, national, and international media; everywhere it seems people are talking about pollinators. And for good reason, a lynchpin of the modern ag industry, our pollinators, specifically bees, are disappearing at an alarming rate. It’s important to understand what pollinators do, what is happening, what can be done to help, and what is being done.

Pollinators
Simply, pollinators are a class of insects that aid plants in spreading pollen; specifically, transporting between the stamen of a plant and the stigma, causing fertilization. Without fertilization, many plants do not produce seeds or fruit, which is usually the part of the plant that ends up on our plate. According to Monsanto, 75% of crop species rely on pollinators to produce seeds or fruit, thus the concern about their sudden disappearance.

Colony Collapse Disorder
In 2006, beekeepers worldwide started to notice an alarming amount of bees disappearing from their hives. Large scale bee deaths are not a new phenomenon, but the severity and scale of the events garnered enough attention to give the new problem a name, colony collapse disorder or CCD. Given the importance of pollinators and the alarming trend of their disappearance, CCD has been the focus of intense research by governments, NGOs, and industry partners to try to elucidate the cause of the problem.

The cause of CCD, to date, has proven to be exceptionally hard to pinpoint, but the trend has begun to move toward the culprit being not one factor, but several factors combined. Indeed, the USDA research suggests a combination of pests, pathogens, pesticides, nutritional deficiencies and bee hive management practices is the cause.

What is being done?
Pending legislation at the federal and state levels focuses on a class of pesticides known as neonicotinoids. While neonicotinoids may have a role in CCD, much of the current research only points to pesticides as playing a contributing role to the onset of CCD. The Minnesota Agri-Growth Council has been involved in the discussions with the bill authors at the state level in Minnesota. In Minnesota, the efforts have been toward labeling home and garden products that contain neonicotinoids, while federal legislation is for an outright ban on neonicotinoids until more research can be carried out.

Driftwatch
Voluntary programs such as Drift Watch have been successful in controlling bee exposure to pesticides. Developed at Purdue University, Drift Watch is a voluntary registry that facilitates communication between beekeepers and pesticide applicators in an effort to limit the interaction between bees and pesticides. Farmers and beekeepers can login to the website and see a map of the locations of apiaries and other sensitive areas and tune their application to minimize potentially adverse contact.

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Northern Crops Institute (NCI) was established in 1982 through the efforts of North Dakota wheat producers who needed a better way to showcase their crops to international buyers. NCI was later expanded to include producers in South Dakota, Minnesota, and Montana. The first classes and technical services were offered in 1983. NCI provides technical and marketing assistance through specialized training courses and technical services that facilitate domestic and international market development and expanded sales of northern grown crops. Representatives from more than 130 countries have visited NCI since its inception. Northern Crops Institute is located on the campus of North Dakota State University.

NCI’s executive director is Mark Weber, whose previous experience includes serving as the executive director for the Red River Valley Sugarbeet Growers Association and executive director of the North Dakota Soybean Council.

Scope of Organization: Northern Crops Institute is an international meeting and learning center that brings together customers, commodity traders, technical experts, agricultural producers, and food and industrial processors for education, discussion and technical services. NCI is a unique cooperative effort between North Dakota, Minnesota, Montana, and South Dakota. The staff of NCI works to support the promotion, market development, and expanded sales of crops grown in this four-state region.

How the Northern Crops Institute is funded: About half of the funding for the Northern Crops Institute comes from the North Dakota State Legislature. The remainder comes from the state legislatures of Minnesota and South Dakota, and from the commodity producer checkoff groups in those three states and Montana.

What is new with NCI?: The NCI was originally built by the wheat industry in this region. Since then, this region has seen a significant increase in corn, soybean and pulse crops. The NCI is responding accordingly by providing increased educational programming and technical services offered to those industries. We hope to complete a nearly $900,000 equipment update at our feed production center. The feed center was built in 1990 and has not had a major update. This effort is in response to growing demand for soybeans, corn, barley used for feed in Southeast Asia and China. Our region is only two days away by rail to the Pacific Northwest where the majority of this region’s crop leaves for export markets. NCI is also hosting more risk management educational courses for our foreign buyers.

Key trends affecting NCI: Both buyers and producers are getting more sophisticated. Buyers are requesting crops with very specific functional characteristics that may not even be included in the present grain grading system. Producers can respond to customers by delivering those crops. The NCI is increasingly being called upon...
to provide this kind of information between buyer and seller.

**NCI’s Legislative Priorities:** Our mission focuses on market development and therefore we do not get involved in farm policy or trade policy lobbying, except to secure NCI program funding through our respective state legislatures.

**Pollinators; continued from cover**

**Industry Efforts**
Industry has stepped up to the plate as well, working with farmers to inform and educate on best practices for application of pesticides. Programs like the American Seed Trade Association’s [Guide to Seed Treatment Stewardship](#) have had a positive impact on bee health.

**More Research Needed**
Part of this year’s bonding request from the University of Minnesota was $3 million for a [bee research laboratory](#). To date, the internationally renowned bee research program at the U of M has been operating out of a 900 square foot cinder block shed. The new facility would provide space to hire another apiculture professor and provide much needed space for conducting bee research. CCD is a critical focus of that research and the new facility would help researchers dig deeper into the causes of CCD.

Thankfully the research will continue. While CCD seems to have abated somewhat in the last few years, the problem still persists. Agri-Growth will continue to be part of the conversation in the halls of the capitol and in the public sphere, to educate and advocate on behalf of its members.

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### Upcoming Events at Agri-Growth

- **April 22nd** - Policy Luncheon with Senator Rod Skoe
- **May 6th** - Policy Luncheon with House Minority Leader Kurt Daudt
- **June 4th** - Legislative Wrap-up Luncheon Panel
- **June 9th** - Agri-Growth Annual Golf Tournament
- **November 6th** - Annual Meeting

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- Don Wick, Red River Valley Farm Network
Policy Luncheon

Thank you to all who attended our first legislative policy luncheon. It was a resounding success. Our first luncheon featured Minnesota House of Representatives Speaker Paul Thissen. Several issues were discussed including minimum wage, pollinators, GMO labeling and tax relief. Thank you to our sponsors, Davis Family Dairies for sponsoring our Luncheon Series.

The next luncheon is on April 22nd and will feature Minnesota Senator and Senate Tax Committee Chair Rod Skoe from Clearbrook.

New Communications Director

Our new Communications Director, Adam Axvig, started on March 4th. Adam was born and raised in Rollag, Minnesota. His previous work experience includes work at the Minnesota Senate, public affairs and public relations work, and political campaign experience working in the communications department for former U.S. Senator Norm Coleman’s re-election campaign.

Norman Borloug 100th Birthday Honored at the U of M

Agri-Growth was on hand at the University of Minnesota McNamara Alumni Center to honor Nobel Prize Laureate Dr. Norman Borlaug’s legacy.

The gathering came on the heels of an unveiling of a new Norman Borlaug statue at the U.S. Capitol. Speaker John Boehner gave remarks at the unveiling in DC. A statue of the “Wheat Whisperer” - identical to the one unveiled in Washington D.C. during ag week, was also on hand at the ceremony.

There were celebrations to honor Dr. Borlaug held around the world, including Minnesota, Iowa, and Washington D.C. among others.

Siehl Prize Winners Announced

The University of Minnesota announced the winners of the 2014 Siehl Prize. Agri-Growth Board Member, Tom Rosen of Rosen’s Diversified took the prize for Agribusiness Excellence. Other recipients included the University of Minnesota’s Dr. Mark Seeley for Knowledge and Richard Magnusson, a farmer from Northwest Minnesota, for Production Agriculture. Congratulations to all of this year’s winners.

Agri-Growth Participates in NAMA Panel

On March 26th, Minnesota Agri-Growth Council Executive Director, Perry Aasness, along with representatives from the University of Minnesota and the Associated Milk Producers participated in a panel held by the National Agri-Marketing Association at Colle+McVoy in Minneapolis. The theme was “The Changing Face of Agriculture: Policy and Consumer Decision Making.” A crowd of 30-50 attended the event.

Colorado State Publishes Agribusiness Friendliness Index

Researchers at Colorado State University published a first-of-its-kind Agribusiness Friendliness Index, ranking states on a number of metrics. South Dakota topped the list for agribusiness friendliness, Minnesota came in at #24, ranking well behind its neighbors.