

September 6, 2018

Dear Farm Bill Conferees:

RE: *Pollinator Conservation Priorities in the 2018 Farm Bill*

On behalf of our millions of members and supporters, the undersigned organizations and companies are writing to urge you to protect pollinators in the next Farm Bill.

Over 85% of all flowering plant species require an animal pollinator (usually an insect) to reproduce. About one-third of food production depends on animal pollinators, and 75% of all fruits and vegetables increase production when visited by a pollinator.

Pollinators have been in the news regularly since colony collapse disorder was identified in honey bees more than a decade ago. Unfortunately, seasonal colony losses of up to 40% are still common in North America. Native bees, which are also vital for agricultural production, are in decline as well. A recent analysis by the Xerces Society and the International Union for Conservation of Nature found that 28% of bumble bees in Canada, the United States, and Mexico are imperiled. Additionally, a recent global analysis by the United Nations, Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services found that up to 40% of pollinator species may be at risk of extinction in the coming years.

While we greatly appreciate that both the House and Senate maintain pollinator protections that were originally included in the 2008 and 2014 Farm Bills, we feel strongly that more needs to be done in order to maintain and increase critical pollinator populations.

Specifically, going into Farm Bill conferencing, we are requesting that you:

- Maintain the new, common sense pollinator provisions included in the Senate Farm Bill:
 - Reconstitute the federal interagency pollinator health task force and objectives,
 - Direct the USDA Chief Scientist to coordinate research on honey bees and other pollinators, and
 - Encourage pollinator habitat development and protection.
- Ensure that key provisions in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) are maintained and improved:
 - Increase acreage, as possible, without undermining quality of program and farmer willingness to participate,
 - Support the expanded grazing options for habitat management passed in the Senate Farm Bill, and
 - Cap rental rates at no more than 100% of the soil rental rate, continue Signing Incentive Payments and Practice Incentive Payments for pollinator habitat practices, and maintain 50% cost-share percentages for establishing approved practices.
- Eliminate provisions that would undermine the Endangered Species Act (ESA) that allow the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to approve pesticides without consulting the federal agencies charged with protecting listed pollinator species.

Maintain the pollinator provisions included in the Senate-passed version of the Farm Bill.

These provisions include:

- Reconstituting the federal interagency pollinator health task force and objectives to formalize coordination among federal agencies working to support pollinators across private and public lands,
- Directing the USDA Chief Scientist to facilitate cost-effective research on honey bees and other pollinators by assigning an individual at USDA to serve as a national honey bee and pollinator research coordinator, and
- Encouragement of Pollinator Habitat Development and Protection, by increasing our understanding and implementation of conservation biological pest control practices and strategies that integrate natural predators of crop pests into agricultural systems for pest control.

These provisions will help both managed and wild pollinators in addition to the farmers that depend on them for pollination of crops. Coordination by agencies is vital if we hope to conserve pollinators and their habitats across both private and public lands, and will allow best use of limited resources in this effort.

Ensure that key provisions of the Conservation Reserve Program are maintained and improved:

- Increase acreage, as possible, without undermining quality of program and farmer willingness to participate,
- Support the expanded grazing options for habitat management passed in the Senate Farm Bill, and
- Cap rental rates at no more than 100% of the soil rental rate, continue Signing Incentive Payments and Practice Incentive Payments for pollinator habitat practices, and maintain 50% cost-share percentages for establishing approved practices.

It is important to continue incentive payments, 50% cost-share funding for restoration, and robust rental rates in order to ensure the habitat value of the program - especially to monarch butterflies, beekeepers and native pollinators. These provisions safeguard the attractiveness of the CRP to farmers and are necessary to fully enroll the program.

Increasing the acreage cap and providing adequate funding levels of cost-share, rental rates, and incentives are a wise investment which translate into critical benefits for soil, water and wildlife, including pollinators.

Maintain current Endangered Species Act (ESA) protections:

Reject changes passed by the House that would fundamentally undermine the Endangered Species Act.

Section 9111 of the House Farm Bill would allow the EPA to unilaterally approve pesticides for use without adequately considering the harm they pose to endangered species. This could potentially have a major impact on pollinators. The rusty patched bumble bee was recently listed as Endangered and there are an additional 29 butterflies currently listed as either Endangered or Threatened. If included in the final Farm Bill, this provision would make these species and potentially many others increasingly vulnerable to extinction.

The fundamental intent of the ESA is to make decisions based on science that will stop and reverse species decline. It is also intended to protect the ecosystems upon which these species depend. Circumventing the processes put in place decades ago and removing the role of the two federal wildlife Agencies charged with administering the ESA would cause permanent, and possibly irreparable, harm. The signatories of this letter request that this provision is not included in the Farm Bill.

Thank you for your consideration of our letter and for working to protect pollinators and the farmers that rely on them.

CC: The Honorable Pat Roberts, the Honorable Debbie Stabenow, the Honorable K. Michael Conaway,
the Honorable Collin Peterson

Sincerely,

National Wildlife Federation

Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation

Oregon Tilth

Pesticide Action Network North America

Friends of the Earth

Center for Food Safety

Center for Biological Diversity

Pollinator Partnership

Wild Farm Alliance

Rural Advancement Foundation International-USA

Organic Seed Alliance

Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future

Organic Consumers Association

Maryland Pesticide Education Network

Beyond Toxics

Occidental Arts and Ecology Center

Spriggly's Beescaping

Meadowscaping for Biodiversity

SandpiperCREATIVE

SaveNature.Org

People and Pollinators Action Network

Aurora's Voice LLC

Friends of Lower Muskingum River

Pollinate Minnesota

Greater Atlanta Pollinator Partnership

Kansas Rural Center

Toxic Free NC

Columbia Slough Watershed Council

Virginia Association for Biological Farming

Nevada Native Plant Society

Iowa Wildlife Federation

Beesponsible

Idaho Organization of Resource Councils

Northeast Organic Farming Association/Massachusetts Chapter (NOFA/Mass)

Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides

Please contact Scott Hoffman Black, sblack@xerces.org, with any questions.