



Five Ways to Protect the Pollinators that Foster our Food and Eco Systems

Bees and other pollinators provide critical ecosystem services in our agricultural and natural landscapes. I am writing to share five easy-to-implement measures your county can take to protect pollinators and other beneficial insects so they can continue to support our diets, environment, and local economies.



Background

Pollinators, such as bees, birds, and bats, affect more third of the world's crop production and contribute over \$15 billion/year to the U.S. economy. New York State alone has seven million acres in agricultural production and 35,500 farms, many of which benefit from or depend on insect pollination.

Pollinator-dependent crops in New York State

| Crop | Annual Economic Contribution Statewide |
|------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Apples | \$250 million |
| Squash & pumpkin | \$75 million |
| Tomatoes | \$47 million |
| Strawberries | \$7 million |
| Cherries | \$3 million |
| Pears | \$2.5 million |

Over the past 30 years, pollinator populations have declined throughout North America and Europe. When the number of pollinators decreases, foods we enjoy every day – like fruits, vegetables, and nuts – become less plentiful and more expensive. A combination of factors contribute to this loss, including pollution, habitat loss, pesticides, and viruses. While counties cannot control all of the factors causing pollinator decline, they can implement protection measures to help slow or reverse this trend.

Five Actions to Protect Pollinators

The following are five pollinator protection measures I encourage your county to adopt:

1. **Mow less.** Highways, roadsides, and other county properties can be a beneficial habitat for pollinators. Mowing less frequently and only where necessary (e.g. close to a highway but not several feet out) is a practical, economical, and timesaving way to improve pollinator habitat. One study found that mowing every three weeks resulted in as much as 2.5 times more lawn flowers (like dandelions and clover) and greater diversity of bee species when compared to mowing weekly.
2. **Limit use of pesticides and insecticides.** Several classes of pesticides and insecticides have the potential to kill or otherwise harm non-target species, including pollinators like honeybees and butterflies. Because bees are usually still in their hives early in the morning and head to bed around dusk, spraying early in the morning or at night can allow the chemicals to dry or dissolve before bees come around the plants to feed. Your county can also switch to pest fighters that will not harm pollinators, including sulfur and corn gluten.
3. **Promote vegetation on solar farms.** Pollinator-friendly solar farms can be a way to reinvigorate pollinator habitats. Conventional utility-scale solar energy management practices, such as using gravel and turfgrass, minimize or prohibit the growth of vegetation. Counties can encourage limited mowing, no pesticide application, and planned seed sowing to attract pollinators to solar farms.
4. **Plant wildflowers and native species.** Inexpensive plants like white clover and yellow sweet clover can provide sugary nectar and protein-rich pollen to honeybees and other pollinators. Counties can beautify parks, office buildings, and other spaces while creating diverse habitats for pollinators by planting low-cost and low-maintenance flora on county properties.
5. **Raise awareness.** An efficient and cost-effective way for counties to promote healthy pollinators populations is to share best management practices (BMPs) with residents and other stakeholders like beekeepers, farmers, and environmental groups. County leaders can work with their planning departments, community colleges, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and Cornell Cooperative Extensions to increase awareness of the importance of pollinators and promote BMPs to improve the health of pollinator populations.



Further Reading

In 2015, Governor Andrew Cuomo formed the New York State Pollinator Task Force to develop a plan to protect and preserve pollinators. [Click here to read the New York State Pollinator Protection Plan](#) and [click here for the June 2018 update](#).