

Protecting pollinators demands diligence

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

TWIN FALLS, Idaho — Colony collapse in honeybees came to the fore in 2006, but no one still knows for sure exactly what's causing it.

There's been a lot of finger pointing, but it appears to be a multitude of things working together.

And with pollinators essential to all flowering plants and crops, it's everyone's job to protect them, Ronda Hirnyck, University of Idaho extension pesticide coordinator, told pesticide applicators during the Agri-Action farm show last week.

Threats include viruses, mites, parasites, pathogens, pesticides, lack of food, and fatigue. With current application practices, pesticides are a minimal risk to bee health, but no one knows how much they might be contributing to the overall decline, she said.

"Maybe we're doing too good of a job on weeds (or) are they being inadvertently exposed to sublethal effects?" she said.

Pollinators need the nutrition from flowers, including flowering weeds. And if bees are already weak from other causes, inadvertent exposure to pesticides might put them over the edge, she said.

More than \$15 billion worth of U.S. crops depend on honeybees alone, and 80 percent of all flowering crops require pollination. In addition to bees, pollinators include Monarch butterflies (also in decline), insects, wasps, hummingbirds and bats, she said.

"They play a huge roll, whether it's in the backyard or out in the mountains," she said.

The approach to protecting them "really is all our jobs," she said.

In 2014, a national initiative was launched to create a strategy to promote the health of honeybees and other pollinators, and EPA was tasked with regulating pesticides that are acutely toxic to bees. The



Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press

Ronda Hirnyck, University of Idaho extension pesticide coordinator, talks about how pesticide applicators can help protect pollinators during Agri-Action 2016 in Twin Falls on Feb. 4.

best way to do that is to put modified application regulations on the chemical label, she said.

EPA is testing pesticides to determine the level of toxicity, but has already identified and labeled neonicotinoids for acute toxicity to bees, she said.

Hirnyck told applicators to take the time to read the label before planning an application.

"I can't stress enough to read the label. It's the sole mechanism to providing information to applicators. The last few years, we've seen some major label changes," she said.

Idaho agriculture uses "neonics" all the time in sugar beets, potatoes and landscape applications, so the emphasis is on how to use them and not kill bees, she said.

Some of those protective methods are just common sense, such as not using them at times of highest risk to bees — when crops are blooming. But applicators also need to think about spray drift and the potential effect on bees if flowering plants or water is con-

taminated by drift, she said.

"You've got to pay attention to when bees are visiting and the surroundings. Some of these chemicals are very toxic in small amounts. Even pesticides in organic (production) can be acutely toxic to bees. If you're organic, you're not off the hook," she said.

Some areas are just dicey, and it might be tough to find a window to spray. Applicators should check bloom on flowering weeds and the weather, which can be a big factor in drift, she said.

It's also better to spray when bees are least active — sunup and sundown. Spraying at sundown allows chemicals on foliage to break down through the night and lower residual toxicity before bees become active during the day, she said.

Communication with beekeepers is also a must and is mandated on labels. They need to be contacted at least 48 hours before an application to allow them to move hives. Any alfalfa seed growers in the area should also be contacted so the grower can protect bees, she said.

Young farmers in the West face additional barriers

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

In addition to the tall barriers facing all young farmers, such as access to land and capital, those in the West are facing a growing water crisis from extended drought and a widening supply-demand gap from a booming population.

In the arid West, where irrigated land comes at a premium, access to water compounds the barriers, according to a new report, Conservation Generation, commissioned by the National Young Farmers Coalition.

The coalition views any farmer 35 or younger as a "young" farmer.

Young farmers are already a scarcity, with only 1,220 young principal farm operators joining the U.S. producer ranks between 2007 and 2012, according to USDA.

Protecting the national food and water supply will require a deeper commitment to young farmers, Kate Greenberg, NYFC Western water program manager, said.

"If we fail to adequately invest in young farmers, we risk losing a generation of water stewards, and land currently farmed will likely fall out of agricultural production and be fallowed, developed or consolidated," she said.

With agriculture accounting for up to 80 percent of human water consumption in Western states, it is often turned to as the first source to free up water for other uses, but "buy and dry" can no longer be the default solution to closing the supply-demand gap, the authors of the report stated.

That gap and the crisis of attrition must be addressed and can be done in tandem by decreasing the barriers to conservation and making the West's working lands affordable for young farmers, they stated.

"Conservation is embed-



Courtesy of National Young Farmers Coalition

Members of the National Young Farmers Coalition affiliate chapter, the Four Corners Farmers and Ranchers Coalition, gather for a workshop at the James Ranch in Durango, Colo., to discuss on-farm practices for soil health and water conservation. The workshop was hosted by NYFC and the Family Farm Alliance.

About the survey

People surveyed: 379 Western farmers, online

Additional: 50 people in eight focus groups

Demographics: Majority did not grow up on a farm or ranch, are within their first 10 years of farming, have small-scale organic operations and are conservation-minded

Average age: 36

Data analysis: Kathleen Hillmire, assistant professor of Environmental Studies, and Rebecca Clausen, associate professor and chairman of the Sociology and Human Services Department, Fort Lewis College, Durango, Colo.; Adrian Oglesby, director, Utton Transboundary Resources Center, University of New Mexico School of Law; and University of New Mexico law students Anne Minard, Stephanie Russo, Zach Ogaz

Commissioned by: National Young Farmers Coalition

ded in the very way young farmers do business. The problem is our policies, programs and funding priorities lag behind these values and practices," the authors stated.

NYFC's survey of young farmers found that water availability, climate change and drought are the top three concerns of young farmers in the West, followed by access to affordable irrigated land. It also found that 94 percent of respondents are already using some form of conservation and 89 percent cited building healthy soils as their primary tool.

Healthy soil is critical to

water conservation, drought resilience and long-term productivity of the land. The healthier the soil, the more water it can store. With each percent increase in organic matter, soils can hold 20,000 gallons or more of additional water per acre, the authors stated.

But many barriers to conservation exist, respondents said.

To start, only 25 percent of respondents are monitoring soil moisture, which would allow farmers to refine irrigation.

One respondent said farmers need better access to cheap and effective tools to monitor and evaluate soil moisture, the authors reported.



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