

## People &amp; Places

# This scientist's passion for bees is helping agriculture

By **SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN**  
Capital Press

CORVALLIS, Ore. — Andony Melathopoulos says his work is pretty sweet.

Melathopoulos leads Oregon State University Extension's statewide pollinator health program and is an assistant professor. Agricultural experts say he's one of the nation's most remarkable innovators in the world of bees.

The researcher has made significant contributions to bee disease studies, has trained thousands of Oregon applicators in how to safely apply pesticides, teaches the public about agriculture and pollination and started America's first statewide native bee inventory.

"I love it when people get excited about bees. A lot of Oregonians I run into — rancher, applicator, Portland person — are like, 'What are these weird little red things zipping along the landscape?' They're really just curious, like me," said Melathopoulos.

Melathopoulos said he has always been interested in the natural world. He remembers watching nature TV shows as a kid and thinking: "How can such creatures exist?"

He grew up in Canada and said that working in Oregon has been "a dream" because Canada doesn't have an extension service and Oregon has a wider range of fauna, or animal life.

In Canada, Melathopoulos grew up in an agricultural



Lynn Ketchum/Oregon State University

**Andony Melathopoulos, OSU Extension pollinator specialist, with honey bees.**



**Melathopoulos with a "bee beard."**

region and worked alongside farmers. Here too, he said he's passionate about the intersection of agriculture and pollination.

Melathopoulos runs a program called the Oregon Bee Project with two different arms. The first helps beekeepers and farmers better care for "managed" bees including honey bees, leaf-

cutter bees, orchard mason bees and alkali bees.

The second arm focuses on native bees, of which Oregon has more than 620 types.

The researcher's latest project, OSU's Master Melittologists program — a melittologist is a bee expert — trains volunteers to locate, identify and preserve bees native to the state in a database called the Oregon Bee Atlas.

He and his colleagues train volunteers and then send them out to catch and track bees. The project has helped promote biodiversity and enabled growers to boost crop yields.

The researcher has trained more than 150 volunteers to collect samples.

"A lot of 'citizen science' programs make peo-

ple do a repetitive task again and again, the grunt work. But these volunteers wanted to be the discoverers. They wanted some independence. So I gave it to them," said Melathopoulos.

Volunteers say this sets Melathopoulos apart from many researchers; he empowers people.

"I just — I don't know how Andony (Melathopoulos) does it because this is just one little part of his job. He's been amazing. And he makes himself available to everyone," said Michael O'Loughlin, 58, a Yamhill County volunteer.

Melathopoulos' native bee studies have been useful in crop pollination efforts, especially in the state's clover seed industry and in Bandon-area cranberries.



## Western Innovator

### ANDONY MELATHOPOULOS

**Occupation:** Assistant professor in horticulture and pollinator health, Oregon State University Extension specialist

**Age:** 49

**Born and raised:** Calgary, Canada

**Education:** Interdisciplinary Ph.D. (2016), Dalhousie University, Halifax, Canada; masters in pest management (1999), Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, Canada; bachelor of science in biology, honors (1995), Simon Fraser University

Melathopoulos said he's also passionate about helping farmers apply pesticides in the safest ways possible. Since 2018, he has trained more than 7,000 pesticide applicators.

He also teaches the public about agriculture and pollination through coloring books, OMSI exhibits and presentations. OMSI is the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry.

And colleagues say in his OSU classrooms, he's training the next generation of bee experts.

## Oregon FFA receives \$500K gift for endowment to expand programs

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**  
Capital Press

CORVALLIS, Ore. — The Oregon FFA Foundation has received its largest single donation of \$500,000 from Northwest Farm Credit Services to expand agricultural education programs and reach more students statewide.

Foundation President Kirk Maag said the money will be used to seed a new endowment fund called "Oregon FFA Today and Tomorrow," that will bolster FFA's leadership and career development opportunities.

"First and foremost, we're just incredibly thankful," Maag said. "We want to be deliberate in making sure that we best invest this gift

in ways that will provide the biggest benefit to our members over an extended period of time."

Maag said the Foundation's Board of Directors will seek input from agriculture teachers and FFA advisers across Oregon to determine priorities for the endowment.

"Our hands aren't overly tied in how we spend this money," Maag said. "Northwest Farm Credit Services has placed a lot of trust in the Oregon FFA Board of Directors to work with our team of very talented employees to think of how we can make the biggest impact."



The Oregon FFA Foundation is the primary source of funding for Oregon FFA and its 11,000 members.

"This endowment will ultimately allow us to reach more students in more communities, and provide expanded opportunities for each of those students," Maag said.

In a statement, Brent Fetsch, Oregon President of Northwest Farm Credit Services, said he hopes other companies will join in contributing to the new endowment.

"Students who participate in FFA are more likely to graduate from high school, and 93% continue their

education beyond high school," said Fetsch, who also serves as the Oregon FFA Foundation secretary and is a former FFA state officer.

Fetsch said he has heard repeatedly from the bank's customers and other agribusiness that recruiting talent is a top concern facing the industry.

"The return on investing in Oregon FFA is more young people graduating high school, pursuing further education or training and ultimately taking their place as the next generation of Oregon agriculture and forest product industries," Fetsch said. "We are grateful for the impactful work Oregon FFA does for over 11,000 students, communities and agriculture."

## Wilco donates \$75K to Santiam Canyon Wildfire Relief Fund

Co-op makes largest single donation in its history

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**  
Capital Press

MT. ANGEL, Ore. — Wilco staff delivered a check for \$75,000 to the Santiam Canyon Wildfire Relief Fund on Jan. 4 to help communities rebuild after a series of destructive wildfires ravaged the area last September.

It is the largest single contribution in the co-op's history. In addition to direct donations from Wilco customers and employees, some employees also converted their unused vacation time to give to the local nonprofit.

"Our hope with any cash donation is that it offers immediate relief to those



Wilco

**Wilco representatives present the Santiam Canyon Wildfire Relief Fund with a \$75,000 check. From left to right are TJ Colson, vice president of store operations; Jeff Buccello, Wilco-Purina Lifestyle production specialist; Tanner Shockey, Stayton farm store manager; Megan Draper, community engagement specialist; Melissa Baurer, Santiam Hospital service integration coordinator; Deana Freres, Santiam Canyon Wildfire Relief Fund adviser; and Maggie Hudson, CEO of Santiam Hospital.**

who need it most," said TJ Colson, vice president of retail store operations for Wilco. "The September wildfires in Oregon added to a historic year of upheaval

and we want to be part of the rebuilding, growth and renewal of our rural communities."

The canyon was devastated by wind-whipped

wildfires that swept through the area during the week after Labor Day. More than 700 homes were destroyed in and around the towns of Detroit, Mill City, Gates, Lyons and Mehama and in the Little North Fork area.

The Santiam Canyon Wildfire Relief Fund has set a goal to raise \$5 million that will go directly to support residents of fire-stricken communities, including Detroit, Mill City, Gates, Lyons and Mehama. To date, the fund has raised more than \$2.6 million.

"This effort means a lot to our employees and farmers, many whom were personally affected by the wildfires," Colson said.

All together, Wilco has donated more than \$120,000 in cash and supplies since the 2020 Oregon wildfires began. That includes a sep-

arate \$25,000 donation to the American Red Cross, and more than \$20,000 in donated supplies — including donations from vendors such as Purina and Nature's Bedding.

Hundreds of Wilco employees also volunteered at county and state fairgrounds that served as evacuation sites during the fires, where families were forced to flee with their animals.

"One positive that came out of the tragic fires was seeing our employees, customers and vendors all rally together to help community members and their animals in a time of real need," Colson said.

Established in 1967, Wilco today serves more than 500,000 customers and has more than 3,000 farmer members across the Pacific Northwest.

## CALENDAR

Submit upcoming ag-related events on [www.capitalpress.com](http://www.capitalpress.com) or by email to [newsroom@capitalpress.com](mailto:newsroom@capitalpress.com).

### TUESDAY-WEDNESDAY JAN. 19-20

**Dairy Strong Annual Conference (virtual):** The annual conference is organized by the Dairy Business Association.

More details to come. Website: <https://www.dairystrong.org>

### TUESDAY-THURSDAY JAN. 19-21

**Idaho Potato Conference (virtual):** The 53rd annual Idaho Potato Conference is scheduled virtually from 8 a.m. to noon Mountain Jan. 19-21. Sessions are free. Advance registration is required. Certified Crop Adviser and Idaho pesticide-recerti-

fication credits are available. A Spanish session is 1 to 3 p.m. Jan. 19. Seminars are slated on topics ranging from potato varieties and quality — including economic ramifications — to disease and recommended practices. Each day will conclude with a presentation by a company working in the industry. Additional details about the conference will be posted at <https://www.uidaho.edu/cals/potatoes/news/idaho-po->

tato-conference. Registration: Kristy Mayer, UI Auxiliary Services, 208-885-4152 or [kristym@uidaho.edu](mailto:kristym@uidaho.edu).

### WEDNESDAY-SATURDAY JAN. 20-23

**41st EcoFarm Conference (virtual):** Save the date for the 41st EcoFarm Conference Jan. 20-23. Building upon its farmer-to-farmer education model, EcoFarm is an essential networking

and educational hub for ecologically minded farmers, ranchers and all who work to support their success in growing a healthy food system and world. Mark your calendars for Jan. 20-23 and get ready for an EcoFarm Conference unlike any before as we will convene online for our 41st event. Phone: 831-763-2111 Email: [info@eco-farm.org](mailto:info@eco-farm.org) Website: <https://eco-farm.org/conference>



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