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USDA, NRCS Grant to Pollinator Partnership and Ohio State University Partner to Evaluate Costs and Benefits of Pollinator-Beneficial Resource Strips in Vegetable Production Systems

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has awarded a matching Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) of \$183,954 to the Pollinator Partnership, the Ohio State University, and Grand Valley State University to evaluate and communicate the ecological and economic costs and benefits of incorporating floral resource strips into vegetable production systems. Agricultural pollinators are in trouble, and research is needed to help growers help their pollinating partners by integrating good habitat into their operations.

The project seeks to demonstrate what pollinator habitat practices will work for vegetable producers, how they will benefit and how pollinator habitat efforts can be integrated into USDA conservation assistance and incentive programs.

Mary Gardiner, Assistant Professor of Entomology at the Ohio State University will lead the research component of this project. The goal of this type of habitat management is to enhance pollination and pest control in adjacent crop fields. Several studies examining these strips look promising, and the next step is to fully evaluate the costs and benefits for growers of implementing this technology.

The 3-year project managed by the Pollinator Partnership focuses on producing realistic, economically sound guidelines for floral resource schemes for vegetable growers, building on important lessons learned from the Pollinator Partnership's earlier pollinator research efforts. Agricultural producers have stepped forward to provide project sites on working farms. Gardiner will advise a MS student who will manage a network of project sites in Ohio, Montana and Arizona. Dr. Stephen Buchmann, adjunct associate professor at the University of Arizona, and author of "The Forgotten Pollinators," will supervise work in Arizona and will coordinate with Dr. Gardiner. Economic analysis will be conducted by Dr. Erik Nordman, Assistant Professor at Grand Valley State University in Allendale, Michigan. Extension activities including workshops and field days hosted within Ohio will be coordinated by OSU Extension Educator Brad Bergefurd.

Habitat loss was identified by the National Academy of Sciences as one of the major contributing factors to the decline in native pollinators and honey bees. Actions to provide improved habitat for pollinators were pointed to as vital to improving the nutrition and health of honey bees and native pollinators. Research is needed to understand what works for native and managed pollinators, as well as for agricultural producers.

NRCS also awarded matching CIGs for important pollinator habitat projects to The Xerces Society and the Gold Ridge Resource Conservation District in Sonoma County, California.

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