



Bee Better Certified:

A Marketplace Incentive Program for Pollinator Conservation

Project Summary

In 2016, the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation and Oregon Tilth received a Conservation Innovation Grant from the Natural Resources Conservation Service to develop Bee Better Certified™, the first pollinator-focused farm and food product eco-label. Between 2016 and 2020, we trialed Bee Better certification on a diverse array of farms across the US. These pilot farms are both organic and conventional, range in size from 15 acres to over 5,000 acres, and grow a variety of crops, from almonds to blueberries, grains to mixed vegetables, and apples to wine grapes.

This new certification program accelerates and expands conservation on private lands, creates a new model for rewarding biodiversity protection by food companies, and provides new marketing opportunities for farmers of all sizes. Backed by a robust set of habitat and pesticide risk reduction criteria, Bee Better Certified™ is independently verified by a third-party certifying agency. The Bee Better Certified™ seal now appears on food products nationwide in retailers such as Costco, Walmart, Trader Joes, Kroger's, and more, reflecting evidence from recent studies that consumers strongly support brands focused on conserving bees and biodiversity.

About Bee Better Certified:

- ✓ Science based: Peer-reviewed research is backed up by top pollinator experts and farmers
- ✓ Third-party certified: Demonstrates independent validation and verification of our commitment to high-quality habitat on every farm
- ✓ Protects farmers: By providing a level playing field, everyone is evaluated equally through the same process
- ✓ Protects consumers: Guarantees retailers and consumers that a certified product actually is creating better places for bees



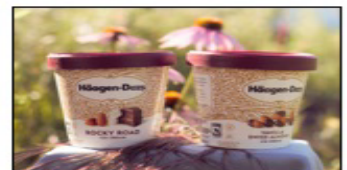
We need bees and now they need us

That's why we created a certification that empowers farmers and consumers to change the world for pollinators.

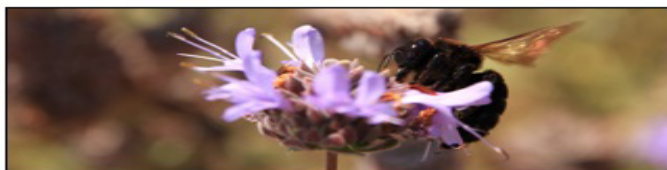
Pollinator populations are in decline in many parts of the world and these declines put agricultural productivity and the health of natural ecosystems at risk. But research shows that pollinator populations rebound when they are provided with habitat and protected from other threats.

On-farm pollinator conservation is a win-win for farmers and pollinators. Pollinator habitat increases the number of crop pollinators within crop fields, contributing to increases in yield. In addition, crops that receive adequate pollination are often of higher quality. Pollinator habitat not only supports pollinators, it also provides refuge to natural enemies of crop pests who provide free pest control services. Habitat can serve as a filter strip and buffer against wind and water erosion. Beautiful, blooming habitat can make farms more attractive to visitors and customers and help farmers tell the story of their commitment to pollinator conservation and sustainable agricultural practices.

Bee Better Certified partners with innovative farmers and food companies to protect bees and other pollinators in agricultural lands. Through a third-party verification process and a rigorous set of scientifically backed and field-tested standards, the Bee Better Certified seal gives consumers confidence that their purchasing decisions benefit pollinators. The program rewards conservation-minded farmers by granting access to new, higher-value markets, and incentivizes the incorporation of pollinator conservation into product supply chains.



Products with the Bee Better Certified seal and ingredient seal. (Photos from left to right: California Giant Berry Farms; Emily Balius; Klickitat Canyon Winery; Rainier Fruit Company; and Cameron Newell)



A native bee visiting a flower on a certified orchard in California. (Photo: Cameron Newell / Xerces Society)



A Bee Better Certified vineyard in Washington. (Photo: Liz Robertson / Xerces Society)



Impact

Bee Better Certified Farms

- 18 Bee Better Certified farms that are supporting bees, butterflies, and other beneficial insects with high-quality habitat. Many more farms are on track for certification.
- Certification of 49 crops and over 20,000 acres of farmland.
- Field trials at 10 farms that tested pollinator habitat restoration methods, including cover cropping, soil solarization, and smother cropping.



California carpenter bee, *Xylocopa californica*, visiting narrowleaf milkweed, *Asclepias fascicularis*, within a Bee Better Certified hedgerow in California. (Photo: Cameron Newell / Xerces Society)



Cover crops planted between rows of almond trees at Gallagher farms attract pollinators as well as beneficial insects that provide natural pest control. (Photo: Jessa Kay Cruz / Xerces Society)



A flowering field border at Vilicus Farms. (Photo: Jennifer Hopwood / Xerces Society)



Aerial view of a Woolf Farming hedgerow in California. (Photo: Cameron Newell / Xerces Society)

Pollinator Habitat

- 45 miles of hedgerows planted.
- 52 acres permanent habitat planted, including hedgerow and meadow habitat.
- Over 400 acres of flowering cover crops planted.
- 197 acres of permanent pollinator habitat protected.



Flowering pollinator habitat at Grinnell Heritage Farm, an organic vegetable farm in Iowa.
(Photo: Cameron Newell / Xerces Society)



Hedgerow featuring native shrubs along a California almond orchard.
(Photo: Cameron Newell / Xerces Society)

Outreach and Education

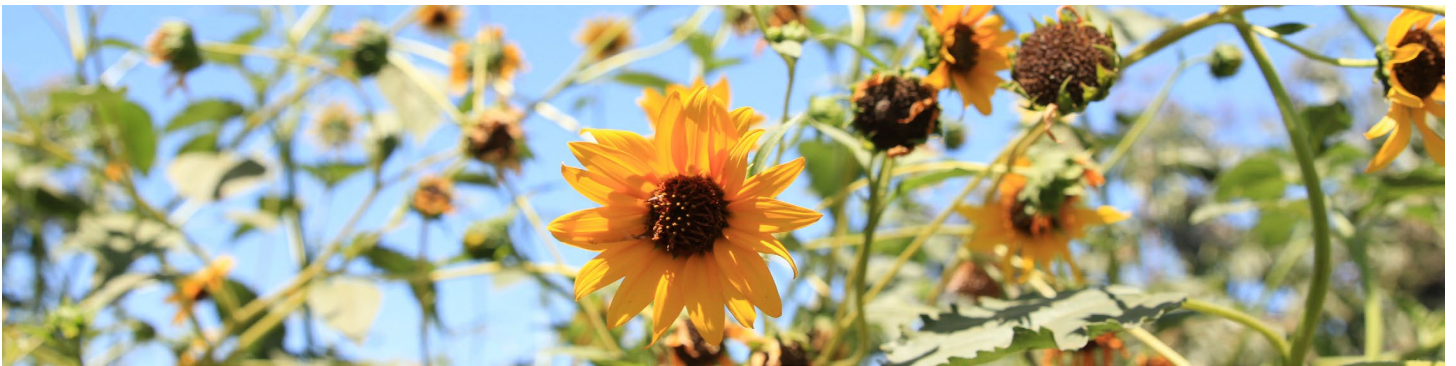
- Hundreds of farmers reached through farm field days, conferences, and other outreach events.
- Media coverage in both print and online outlets, with Bee Better Certified appearing in 720 articles that reached an estimated 224 million people.



Participants tour Bee Better Certified habitat at a California almond orchard during a field day.
(Photo: Liz Robertson/ Xerces Society)



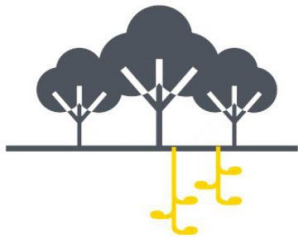
Bee Better Certified booth at the 2018 Almond Board Conference.
(Photo: Cameron Newell / Xerces Society)



Methods

It Starts with Habitat

The first step to protecting pollinators is providing abundant sources of pollen and nectar throughout the growing season. We ask farmers to dedicate a minimum 5% of their land to habitat, which can be a mixture of permanent features, such as hedgerows, and temporary resources, such as flowering cover crops.



Include Nest Sites

Like us, pollinators need a place to call home. Farmers provide nesting sites by including plants with pithy-stems for cavity-nesting bees, undisturbed ground that provides cover for soil-nesting bees, and butterfly host plants so butterflies have a place to lay their eggs.

Protection from Pesticides

Prevention, mitigation, and protection are all part of the Bee Better strategy for minimizing the exposure of pollinators to pesticides. A comprehensive pest management strategy includes monitoring, using non-chemical practices as a first line of defense, targeting pesticide use, and limiting or eliminating the use of high-risk pesticides.



Better Managed Bumble Bees

Commercially bred bumble bees are often used in greenhouses for pollination, but can transfer diseases to wild bumble bee populations. Our standards require that managed bumble bees include only native species reared within their native range, and that they only be used in sealed, controlled environments.

Third-Party Verified

Farms are inspected by Oregon Tilth, a leading non-profit certifier, to ensure all conditions required by the Program Standards are being met.





BEE BETTER
CERTIFIED

Products

Bee Better Certified Website & Social Media

Beebettercertified.org provides information about the certification process to potential farmer and corporate partners while also informing consumers about the mission of Bee Better Certified. The Bee Better blog and social media channels (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook) share program updates and topical information on farming practices that align with the values and standards of Bee Better.

Outreach Events

This project resulted in significant outreach to farm audiences, the media, food industry professionals, and the general public, reaching 1,900 people through the following events:

- Two field days highlighting the Bee Better Certified program featuring field tours at certified farms in California and Iowa.
- A nationwide webinar attended by over 80 people on how to apply for Bee Better Certification.
- Participation in 13 food industry and sustainable agriculture conferences and trade shows, where farmers and companies were introduced to the certification program.



Xerces Society Executive Director Scott Hoffman Black speaks to field day participants in Iowa. (Photo: Sarah Nizzi / Xerces Society)



Participants listen to presentations from the NRCS and Colusa County Resource Conservation District during a field day. (Photo: Eric Lee-Mäder / Xerces Society)

Informational Materials

Multiple brochures and guides, tailored to target audiences, describe the certification and visually synthesize the key aspects of the habitat and pesticide mitigation standards.

All materials are available on the Bee Better Certified website at beebettercertified.org/docs.



Bee Better Certified: A Farmer's Guide Offers growers an overview of the program, certification standards, and the certification process.



Bee Better Basics: An Introduction to the Bee Better Certified Program and the *Bee Better Certified Brochure* highlight the benefits of pollinator conservation and the market-based certification program to farmers, consumers and pollinators.



Bee Better Certified Production Standards provides a detailed description of the standards that must be met and maintained to receive certification.



Bee Better Certified: Background to the Production Standards details the research and reasoning behind the development of each individual standard.



Five fact sheets for producers provide a snapshot of specific aspects of the Bee Better standards and the steps commonly taken to implement recommended practices. Topics include habitat requirements, mass-balance substitution, and how certified organic farms can become Bee Better Certified.



The *Bee Better Conservation Plan* template outlines the core practices that are required under the Bee Better Certified Standards and aids growers in both achieving those standards and documenting them for the certification process.



Sourcing and label use guides inform licensees of the proper use of the seals for use on products and in promotional materials.



Challenges and Lessons Learned

Building a Base to Support Supply Chain Needs

As we have built the Bee Better Certified program, it has become clear that the demand for certified ingredients is greater than what our producer-partners can quickly supply. Going from the concept phase to seeing the Bee Better certified seal on packages can be a long process, which can lead to a lag time between when food manufacturers hope to source a certified ingredient and when producers have certified crops available. Anticipating future needs for certified products and working with key partnerships to build a greater supply can help close this gap.

Keeping it Simple Yet Effective

Building simple certification standards that effectively conserve pollinators and are easily understandable is a challenging task. Over the course of the project, we refined the standards so that they better reflected the needs of a diversity of farmer stakeholders and we created materials to better communicate certification requirements. For the program to thrive, it needs to continue to find real value for the farmers, both big and small, that are adopting Bee Better.

Next Steps

Expanded Outreach to Consumers

Consumer demand, the ultimate driver of this regenerative agriculture work, is at an all-time high. Even with the COVID-19 pandemic, this trend has been increasing. Further partnerships with the food industry will help us develop additional strategies for reaching and engaging consumers.

Building Strategic Partnerships

Farms, processors, food companies, and the food service industry continue to show strong support for third-party verified pollinator-friendly practices and products. Through conferences, trade shows, online media and targeted outreach, we will continue to build awareness about the program by growing relationships with strategic partners that strengthen our mission, building upon common values of pollinator conservation and finding value for the much-needed work on the ground.

Developing Crop-Specific Information

Based upon the inquiries we have received from the food industry and retailers, we have identified target crops that will be key to continued program growth: almonds, wine grapes, blueberries, and tree fruit. We are working on the ground to understand the benefits of Bee Better Certified to the production and marketing of these crops.

Project Partners

The Xerces Society

Named for the first butterfly species known to go extinct due to habitat destruction, the [Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation](#) is an international nonprofit organization that protects the natural world through the conservation of invertebrates and their habitats. By using applied research, engaging in advocacy, providing educational resources, and addressing policy implications, the Xerces Society endeavors to make meaningful long-term conservation a reality. For the past decade, the Xerces Society's Pollinator Program has partnered with land managers, farmers, researchers, and the Natural Resource Conservation Service to implement and evaluate habitat targeted at enhancing pollinator populations and bolstering crop production. The techniques we have developed form the basis for Bee Better Certified.

Oregon Tilth

[Oregon Tilth](#) is a leading nonprofit certifier, serving over 3,000 farms and processors across the US and Mexico. Since 1974, Oregon Tilth's mission is to make our food system and agriculture biologically sound and socially equitable. It does this by focusing on organic certification, education, conservation, public policy and marketplace sustainability.



Partnering Farmers and Food Companies

Bee Better Certified has engaged many stakeholders in supporting pollinator conservation on farms and within food industry supply chains, including these companies and brands:

