

# Apples, berries, native bee buzz

By EDITH MUNRO

**N**ORTHEASTERN growers of some of the region's iconic crops — blueberries, cranberries, apples and more — are deeply concerned about the ongoing threats to honeybees, and the cost of renting hives.

Mike Smolak, for example, depends on bees to pollinate apples, pumpkins and blueberries at Smolak Farms of North Andover, Mass. "Last year, I lost eight of nine honeybee hives to varroa mites and colony collapse disorder."

Smolak is looking into native pollinators like the orchard mason bee as an option to manage pollination risk on his farm. He's also keen on bumblebees.

"Most people think honeybees are wonderful," he adds. "But they prefer dandelions along the roadside."

In southeastern Massachusetts, cranberry grower Adrienne Kravitz' AK Cranberries farm at Bridgewater hired honeybee hives — until recently. "But not for the past two years,"

## Key Points

- Declining hive numbers have tripled "hired" honeybee costs.
- Growers are discovering native pollinators can also do the job.
- Amount of information growing on encouraging native bees.

Kravitz reports. "Prices for hives have gone up. We used to pay \$30 per hive. Then we were looking at \$90 a hive.

"We typically needed one to 1.5 million bees to get the necessary pollination. It just wasn't economical," she adds.

Even without honeybees, Kravitz feels her crop got adequate pollination from native bees in the area. She attributes that to extensive uncultivated land around her cranberry bogs. Now she's exploring new ways to improve native pollinator habitat and encourage larger populations.

## Native bee interest grows

Compared to other parts of the country, New England and the Mid-Atlantic states are ideally



**PEACHY POLLINATION:** Massachusetts' Mike Smolak insists that bumblebees are great pollinators. "They like apples a lot and will work when it's wet."

suited to native bees, suggests David Biddinger, Penn State University Extension fruit entomologist. "We have lots of small orchards on hillsides surrounded by wood lots and fencerows — a mix of natural and agricultural land.

"We have several [apple] farms of 500 to 1,000 acres that have been using only native bees for almost 30 years in their orchards," he says. "These are fresh-market growers. They need big fruit, and they're not seeing any losses

from relying on native bees."

One major stumbling block has been the lack of specific information on what habitat and management changes are required by native bees. "Encouraging bees isn't a 'one-size-fits-all' proposition," points out Linda Rinta, of Massachusetts' Plymouth County Soil and Water Conservation District, who works with the Xerces Society to manage an on-farm native-bee demonstration project.

"We realize farmers don't



**UNBUMBLING BERRY BEE:** Alternative pollinators such as the bumblebee don't get the respect they deserve.

have extra time to tend wildflowers. They need something that will sustain without a lot of work, give bees a nutrition source throughout the growing season, and cannot introduce noxious weeds," says Rinta.

"Just because you have flowers blooming doesn't mean you have pollen for bees," she warns.

For growers considering native bees, Biddinger recommends "How to Manage the Blue Orchard Bee as an Orchard Pollinator," by Jordi Bosch and Bill Kemp. It's available free on-line at [www.sare.org/publications/bob.htm](http://www.sare.org/publications/bob.htm), and "Managing Alternative Pollinators," from the Xerces Society.

Munro writes from Des Moines, Iowa.

## Travel with American Agriculturist!

Exclusive  
Ag Tour-  
Limited  
Seats!



### Tour Host, Mike Wilson

Executive Editor, Farm Futures Magazine

Agriculture is booming in Brazil, and here is your chance to see it in action for 10 days, 8 nights! Depart Dallas for Sao Paulo, where you'll visit the country's largest fresh produce market, and take a city tour. Then continue to see the country's agricultural diversity. You'll visit research fields and tour Embrapa Soybean, the National Soybean Research Center. You'll also see the largest ag co-op in Brazil, see grain farms and attend the Coopavel Farm Show. Your tour continues with a trip to Iguacu Falls and the Itaipu Dam, the largest hydroelectric facility in the world. Finish your visit with a stay in Rio de Janeiro.

**ITINERARY:** Sao Paulo, Londrina, Campo Mourao, Cascavel, Foz do Igauçu, Rio de Janeiro

**PRICE:** \$5,599 per person, based on double occupancy \$500 deposit due upon registration



**Tour includes:** Round-trip airfare from departure city, superior tourist class accommodations, meals as outlined in itinerary, transportation provided in luxury air-conditioned motorcoaches, sightseeing and technical visits as outlined in itinerary, services of a full-time professional tour manager with agricultural background, all taxes and fees. Price based on current airfare and exchange rates. Itinerary subject to change.

**Discover agriculture in another country. Meet other U.S. and foreign farmers. One good idea pays for your trip!**

For a complete itinerary go to [www.agtoursusa.com](http://www.agtoursusa.com) or call 1-800-758-2042.

Trump Tours 1308 E. Central Ave. Bentonville AR 72712