Invest in pollination for success with highbush blueberries

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Blueberries require pollination by bees in order to yield a large, marketable crop. Better pollination (e.g., more bees pollinating) = bigger berries. Advance planning for pollination management is essential to maximize blueberry growers' return on investment for their crop. Some of the main takeaway messages from this talk include:

- Both managed bees and wild bees can be important contributors to blueberry pollination.
- Honey bees are key managed pollinators that can be moved into fields for bloom and removed in time for post-bloom pest management. Stocking rates can be adjusted to fit different farm and cultivar requirements. Cultivars vary in how much cross-pollination they need – set stocking rates accordingly.
- Wild bees - some of which are extremely efficient blueberry pollinators – can be plentiful and diverse in landscapes with natural habitat. Their populations can be enhanced in other landscapes by providing food and shelter resources on farm.
- Blueberry flowers are only receptive to pollen for a few days, so it's important to get them pollinated quickly. With variable spring weather, this means it's key to have bees ready to go after rainy or cold days.
- Diversifying your sources of pollination may help manage pollination risk. Bumble bees are excellent blueberry pollinators that fly in colder and rainier weather than honey bees, and may be a good addition to honey bees in areas with variable spring weather. Bumble bees can be purchased from commercial suppliers or can be encouraged on farm by providing flowering resources that bloom throughout the summer.
- Conserve wild bees by setting aside or creating new flowering habitat for their nesting and food after blueberry bloom.
- Minimize pesticide risk: don't spray when bees are active on crop flowers, spray at night or in the early morning, select less toxic chemistries whenever possible, and minimize spray drift onto flowering plants in field margins after crop bloom.

For more information and a variety of resources on growing blueberries, visit http://blueberries.msu.edu/.

Integrated Crop Pollination Project

Different strategies to support pollination of fruit and vegetable crops are currently being monitored on over 100 farms nationwide as part of the Integrated Crop Pollination Project, a multi-year research partnership involving fifteen organizations, including research institutions, federal agencies, and other interdisciplinary stakeholders. Integrated Crop Pollination (ICP) is a concept that combines the use of managed pollinators (such as honey bees, bumble bees, and mason bees) with the restoration of habitat for wild

pollinators and the adoption of bee-friendly farm practices to ensure the reliable and economical pollination of crops. For more information, check out the project website at http://www.projecticp.org/.

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