



Things are buzzing at Beds Growers

As the single biggest land users in the UK, farmers and growers have a major impact on the environment and biodiversity. During the last 50 years, the continual demand to maximise crop yields has resulted in more intensive farming techniques, a move towards monoculture and the widespread use of artificial fertilisers and pesticides. However, greater awareness of the effects of agricultural practices on the natural environment has seen a move to become 'greener' and ensure that our activities are complimentary to and do not adversely affect our wildlife. While there may appear to be a conflict between these approaches there are activities that we as growers can undertake that not only benefit our environment, but can also provide a profit centre and revenue stream.



Bees play a vital role in our economy. It is estimated that forty per cent of the food we eat is dependent on pollination by insects including bees, and the honey they produce is worth over £200 million to the British economy alone. However in the last 20 years, the number of bee colonies has halved due to changes in land use, the spread of varroa mites and the cold wet summers we have experienced. If we can help to overcome this decline in bee populations, it will not only ensure better crop yields, but also provide a healthy food source and welcome additional income.

A single hive contains between 40 and 50 thousand bees. Most are workers that spend their days foraging for pollen and nectar, flying up to several miles in search of food. Bees travelling only one mile, means that a single hive can service over 2000 acres (800 hectares). That's a lot of plants pollinated and underlines just how crucial bees are to the farming sector.



But it's not just the role that bees play in crop production. A single beehive can produce up to 40kg of honey in a good year, which at current prices gives a return of around £250. Bee colonies are highly organised, but they do need some management. They require feeding with sugar solution in the autumn to see them through the winter, and weekly visits during the spring and summer to check all is well and maximise yield. However the time involved is a good investment for the contribution bees make to both the environment and the local economy.

In order to encourage the bee population, many organisations are now taking a pro-active approach to take advantage of the benefits they bring to agriculture. Bedfordshire Growers, a consortium of local farmers in the Eastern region, maintain 12 hives based at their main depot. As a result, some ½ million bees are buzzing around Bedfordshire busy pollinating commercial crops, gardens and wild plants, and producing some 500 kg of honey for the local population as well as preserving the local bee population.



Alastair Waters, managing director of Bedfordshire Growers commented, “The decline in bee colonies in recent years has been well publicised and it is still open to debate whether it’s due to farming methods, pesticides, parasites, adverse weather or a combination of all these factors. Whatever the cause, as growers we should all be proactive and take positive measures to ensure our bees continue to thrive. It will benefit our industry, our economy and our wildlife for generations to come.”

Ends

Editor’s notes

High resolution photos available on request
Images courtesy of dan/FreeDigitalPhotos.net

More about Bedfordshire Growers

Bedfordshire Growers was founded in 1963 as a co-operative of local farmers and horticulturalists business to promote the highest standards of crop marketing and presentation that customers demand. The business focuses on packing and distributing the traditional Bedfordshire vegetable crops of onions and potatoes.

The first packhouse was constructed on the site in 1966, but has expanded and now includes three packing houses fitted with the latest crop grading and packing equipment, cold stores and long term controlled atmosphere stores. The business occupies a 98 acres site which includes adjacent farmland. Bedfordshire Growers currently employs over 35 full time staff, which is supplemented by up to 60 temporary staff for grading and packing during peak periods.

The business also provides requisite supplies to farms and local growers. The Farm Shop and Country Store offers local produce and fresh foods, pet foods, horse feeds, and garden products for sale to the local community.

Still a grower-owned consortium, the group’s success has attracted growers from wider fields and Bedfordshire Growers now distributes root and salad crops from growers throughout the Eastern Counties and Spain to multiple retail outlets, wholesale food services and food processors.

For further information

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