

Buzzworthy: Honeybee health blooming at federal facilities across the country

June 3 2023, by Mark Pratt



A bee arrives at a hive on the roof of the Warren Rudman U.S. Court House, Friday, May 5, 2023, in Concord, N.H. Credit: AP Photo/Robert F. Bukaty

While judges, lawyers and support staff at the federal courthouse in Concord, New Hampshire, keep the American justice system buzzing,

thousands of humble honeybees on the building's roof are playing their part in a more important task—feeding the world.

The Warren B. Rudman courthouse is one of several federal facilities around the country participating in the General Services Administration's Pollinator Initiative, a [government program](#) aimed at assessing and promoting the health of bees and other pollinators, which are critical to life on Earth.

"Anybody who eats food, needs bees," said Noah Wilson-Rich, co-founder, CEO and chief scientific officer of the Boston-based Best Bees company, which contracts with the government to take care of the honeybee hives at the New Hampshire courthouse and at some other federal buildings.

Bees help pollinate the fruits and vegetables that sustain humans, he said. They pollinate hay and alfalfa, which feed cattle that provide the meat we eat. And they promote the health of plants that, through photosynthesis, give us clean air to breathe.

Yet the busy insects that contribute an estimated \$25 billion to the U.S. economy annually are under threat from diseases, agricultural chemicals and habitat loss that kill about half of all honeybee hives annually. Without [human intervention](#), including beekeepers creating new hives, the world could experience a bee extinction that would lead to global hunger and economic collapse, Wilson-Rich said.



Beekeepers from Best Bees inspect two hives on the roof of the Warren Rudman U.S. Court House, Monday, May 15, 2023, in Concord, N.H. Credit: AP Photo/Robert F. Bukaty

The pollinator program is part of the federal government's commitment to promoting sustainability, which includes reducing [greenhouse gas emissions](#) and promoting climate resilient infrastructure, said David Johnson, the General Services Administration's sustainability program manager for New England.

The GSA's program started last year with hives at 11 sites.

Some of those sites are no longer in the program. Hives placed at the National Archives building in Waltham, Massachusetts, last year did not

survive the winter.

Since then, other sites were added. Two hives, each home to thousands of bees, were placed on the roof of the Rudman building in March.

The program is collecting data to find out whether the honeybees, which can fly 3 to 5 miles from the roof in their quest for pollen, can help the health of not just the plants on the roof, but also of the flora in the entire area, Johnson said.



Bees return to one of two hives on the roof of the Warren Rudman U.S. Court House, Friday, May 5, 2023, in Concord, N.H. Credit: AP Photo/Robert F. Bukaty

"Honeybees are actually very opportunistic," he said. "They will feed on a lot of different types of plants."

The program can help identify the plants and landscapes beneficial to pollinators and help the government make more informed decisions about what trees and flowers to plant on building grounds.

Best Bees tests the plant DNA in the honey to get an idea of the plant diversity and health in the area, Wilson-Rich said, and they have found that bees that forage on a more diverse diet seem to have better survival and productivity outcomes.

Other federal facilities with hives include the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services headquarters in Baltimore; the federal courthouse in Hammond, Indiana; the Federal Archives Records Center in Chicago; and the Denver Federal Center.

The federal government isn't alone in its efforts to save the bees. The hives placed at federal sites are part of a wider network of about 1,000 hives at home gardens, businesses and institutions nationwide that combined can help determine what's helping the bees, what's hurting them and why.



The Warren Rudman U.S. Court House is seen Friday, May 5, 2023, in Concord, N.H. The roof of the building hosts two bee hives as apart of a national effort to increase the population of pollinators. Credit: AP Photo/Robert F. Bukaty



Spencer Mangiacotti, left, and, Anthony Zunino, beekeepers for Best Bees, inspect two hives on the roof of the Warren Rudman U.S. Court House, Monday, May 15, 2023, in Concord, N.H. Credit: AP Photo/Robert F. Bukaty



Spencer Mangiacotti, left, and, Anthony Zunino, beekeepers for Best Bees, inspect two hives on the roof of the Warren Rudman U.S. Court House, Monday, May 15, 2023, in Concord, N.H. Credit: AP Photo/Robert F. Bukaty

The GSA's Pollinator Initiative is also looking to identify ways to keep the bee population healthy and vibrant and model those lessons at other properties—both government and private sector—said Amber Levofsky, the senior program advisor for the GSA's Center for Urban Development.

"The goal of this initiative was really aimed at gathering location-based data at facilities to help update directives and policies to help facilities managers to really target pollinator protection and habitat management regionally," she said.

And there is one other benefit to the government honeybee program that's already come to fruition: the excess honey that's produced is donated to area food banks.

© 2023 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed without permission.

Citation: Buzzworthy: Honeybee health blooming at federal facilities across the country (2023, June 3) retrieved 4 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-06-buzzworthy-honeybee-health-blooming-federal.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.