A variety of bee species down on the farm leads to juicer fruits

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BOSTON—There are more than 2500 bee species around the world that pollinate plants, and research has shown that having a variety of pollinators can boost crop yields and naturally control pests. Yet in many farm environments, there’s only one bee to be found: *Apis mellifera*, the European honey bee. Thousands of years of domestication have made this insect able to pollinate under a wide variety of circumstances, but native wild bees (such as this metallic green bee) need native habitat, which is often in short supply in agricultural environments. According to new findings reported here today at the annual meeting of AAAS, which publishes *Science*, farmers can invite greater bee diversity in their fields by diversifying their crops. Researchers looked at 15 farms in central California, some of which grew only strawberries and some of which grew strawberries along with other crops like broccoli, raspberries, and kale. They found that several different bee species buzzed around the diversified farms, whereas only the European honey bee pollinated the strawberry-only ones. Being located near natural vegetation further increased bee species diversity. The strawberries from these diversified farms were plumper, firmer and more symmetrical—all qualities that make the fruit more marketable for farmers. Other crops would also likely benefit from this process, the researcher noted, and planting hedgerows between crops could provide native vegetation for farms isolated from the natural environment.