



# #InThisGen Earth





# Can bees strengthen the link from farm to fork?

Many foods we enjoy — including fruits, nuts, and chocolate — wouldn't exist without insects, especially bees. In California, about 10 percent of the 1,500 native bee species pollinate crops. But the state's farmers rely almost entirely on one pollinator, the non-native European honeybee.

That's because California's farms tend to be monocultures, vast plantings of the same crop. Monocultures require many pollinators for their brief burst of blooming, forcing farmers to truck hordes of honeybees from far away. They also need more chemicals to fend off pests and disease. All these factors may contribute to colony collapse disorder, which causes worker bees to abandon hives and leads to the death of a colony.

**“Relying on honeybees alone creates a brittle system.** We have a weak link in the chain from farm to fork,” says Berkeley conservation biologist **Claire Kremen**.

**Native bees could help farmers' productivity.** Studies show that increased visits by such wild pollinators prompt plants to bear more fruit. And simply having them nearby helps honeybees more effectively pollinate California's almond crop — four-fifths of the world's supply.

Kremen concludes that farmers could attract more wild pollinators in three ways:

- Combine row crops with fruit/nut orchards and flower gardens
- Plant crops close to natural habitat
- Reduce pesticide use ■