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Walmart changes produce supplier policy, aims to protect pollinators

April 13, 2021

Walmart is committing to source 100 percent of the fresh produce and floral it sells in its produce departments from suppliers that adopt integrated pest management practices. The company is imagining mornings without orange juice, summer picnics without strawberries and holiday dinners without apple pie. "Such a future is possible if we don't take collective action to begin restoring pollinator habitats around the world," said, Martin Mundo, Walmart's senior vice president, general merchandise manager, produce and global produce sourcing.

"To help improve pollinator health and biodiversity in the regions in which we operate, Walmart U.S. is announcing new pollinator commitments that will further our efforts to help reverse nature loss and ultimately bring us closer to meeting new nature commitments made by Walmart and the Walmart Foundation," said Mundo. "We have invited our suppliers, stakeholders, and customers to join us on this journey as we continue to take action to help protect our planet."

These new commitments serve as one of the largest pollinator health efforts from a U.S. grocery retailer to-date, aiming to reduce several pollinator threats through promoting integrated pest management practices and improving and expanding pollinator habitats.

It's estimated that one out of every three bites of food we eat is possible because of animal pollinators. Bees are the most popular pollinators, but there's an entire segment of the animal kingdom that helps pollinate the food we eat, including some that grow in our own home gardens. Pollinators include butterflies and moths, birds, bats, beetles and many more, and without them some of our favorite foods wouldn't exist.

Yet studies show these vital pollinator populations have been declining over the last 30 years due to loss of habitat, pests, pollution, pesticides, and a changing climate, among other contributing factors.

"One of the contributors to pollinator decline is the use of pesticides," said Mundo. "Pollinator exposure to pesticides can be reduced by minimizing the use of pesticides, incorporating alternative forms of pest control and adopting a range of specific application practices through an Integrated Pest Management system. Therefore, Walmart U.S. is committing to source 100 percent of the fresh produce and floral it sells in its produce departments from suppliers that adopt IPM practices, as verified by a third-party, by 2025.

"We are also encouraging fresh produce suppliers to phase out use of chlorpyrifos and nitroguanidine neonicotinoids pesticides (where applicable unless mandated otherwise by law), avoid replacing them with other products with a level I bee precaution rating and assess and report annual progress," said Mundo.

Improve and Expand Pollinator Habitats

Pollinators are fundamental for around 80 percent of all flowering plants and more than three-quarters of the food crops that feed us. To help improve and expand pollinator habitats, Walmart U.S. will encourage fresh produce suppliers to protect, restore or establish pollinator habitats by 2025 on at least 3 percent of land they own, operate and/or invest in and report annual progress. The company will also continue to avoid selling invasive plant species in our retail stores. And Walmart said it will work with local organizations to protect, restore or establish pollinator habitats in major

pollinator migration corridors.

"For example, expanding upon our pollinator garden pilot, the "Big Nature" landscape of Walmart's future Home Office campus will support local populations of plant pollinators," said Mundo. "In particular, meadows planted near lakes will provide ample undisturbed pollinator foraging habitat as well as important water access and the potential for more intentional nesting habitat spaces for insects, small animals and birds."

In addition, the company has partnered with solar developers to establish pollinator habitats around solar panel arrays like the one at its distribution center in Laurens, SC, and through Walmart's lead participation on community solar farms across Minnesota. The company said it will continue to look for opportunities to establish more pollinator habitats where feasible.

Finally, the Walmart Foundation recently granted funding to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the Cornell Atkinson Center for Sustainability to leverage citizen science data to monitor pollinators more cost-effectively, unlocking opportunities to improve conservation planning, farm practices and landscape management in the United States.

"To help educate and engage our customers about pollinator plants for home gardens, Walmart U.S. is encouraging suppliers to label pollinator-friendly plants as attractive to pollinators in our retail locations," said Mundo. "Starting this month, plants that attract pollinators will feature special tags to help customers grow their own pollinator gardens. In total, more than 1.3 million annual and perennial pollinator-promoting plants will carry tags in Walmart stores this spring.

"Driving the scale of our collective pollinator commitments through our supply chain can create industry-leading changes and have a significant positive impact for the future of our planet," said Mundo. "It can also help prevent mornings without orange juice and summer picnicks without strawberries — as long as we work together to protect the pollinators that serve the earliest roles in getting some of our favorite foods from farm to table. "

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