

Creating farmland homes for wild bees

The BEESPOKE project set out to increase levels of pollinators using local- and landscape-scale approaches, thereby contributing to the development of sustainable and resilient agroecosystems

Around 80% of crop and wild-flowering plants depend on animal pollination. However, pollinators are in decline across Europe due to the loss of flower-rich habitats, climate change, pollution and more. BEESPOKE is an EU-funded Interreg North-Sea Region project, including the UK, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Sweden and Norway, that set out to find solutions and incentives to support wild pollinators.

BEESPOKE specifically focused on creating habitats for the right pollinators on farmland. The types of pollinators needed differ depending on the crop; solitary bees, for example, are better at pollinating apples, whereas beans need bumblebees. To address this diversity, the project produced seed mixes for flower plots which are tailored to the context. The mixes contain seeds for native flowers which attract the key pollinators for the crops that the farmer is growing, while not supporting their pests.

John Holland, project coordinator, says “We wanted to encourage farmers across the North-Sea Region to plant more wildflower areas. Supporting pollination can positively affect crop yield quality and farm income.” During the project, over 300 new flower plots were created on participating farms to demonstrate and evaluate the benefits of the BEESPOKE wildflower seed mixes for wild bees and the crops they pollinate. This covered eight crop types which are commonly produced in the North Sea Region, including apple, pear, strawberry, sweet cherry, raspberry, blackcurrant, oilseed rape, and broad bean.

The mixes are attractive to a wide array of pollinators, other beneficial insects, and overall biodiversity. The beneficial insects included insects that help control crop pests, demonstrating that the flower mixes also have additional benefits for crop production.

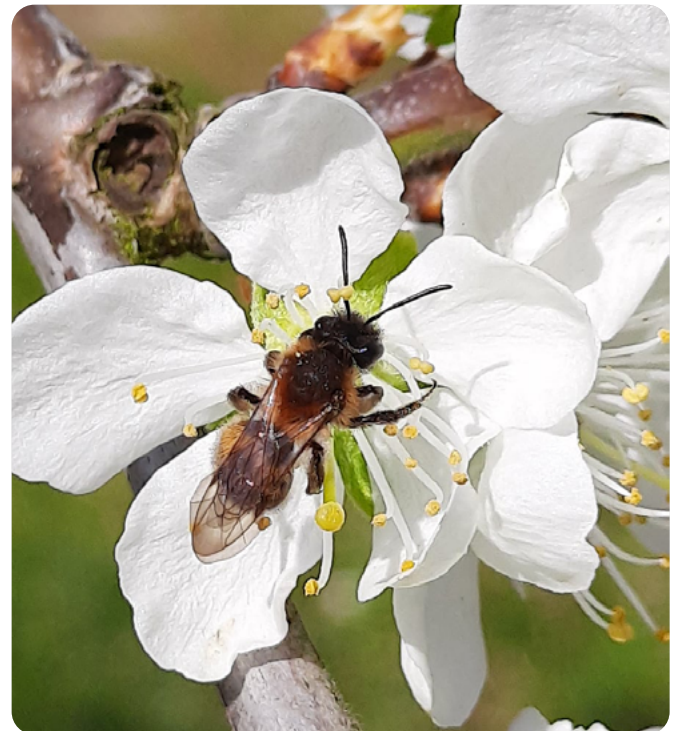
One of the mixes is a grassland seed mix, containing herbaceous flowering plants that not only support bees, but also provide nutritious forage for livestock, especially in dry summers. Nils von Deetzen, livestock farmer from Germany, saw an immediate difference in his fields “There are now always butterflies or bees. Always when you walk through these areas you see pollinators, which you would not have seen before.” He also noticed new types of birds feeding on the insects that were attracted by his flowering plants, demonstrating how he is supporting the ecosystem.

Alongside these seed mixes, BEESPOKE also developed guidelines and training for farmers. A wide range of materials includes guides on monitoring the numbers and diversity of pollinators, and on estimating pollination potential. These help to gain valuable insight into the relationship between crop yield and pollination.

Two online tools help land managers assess pollination by wild bees, predict the effect of adding extra habitats, and choose the best flower mix to enhance pollinators. John Holland again: “Selecting the most appropriate wildflower seed mix for a locality is crucial. Environmental factors such as soil type and shade can be highly influential on which species will thrive. Thanks to the project’s results, we have created a database of plants used by pollinators, and an online seed selection tool so that farmers can develop their own mixes suited to their requirements and locality.”

Through feedback from stakeholders and project activities, the project compiled and publicised a set of policy recommendations to encourage pollinators. This includes recommendations on how to improve agri-environment schemes from farmers’ point of view.

John Holland concludes: “It is estimated that insect pollination is worth €15 billion in the EU, it is essential for ensuring a supply of food, and maintaining sustainable and resilient agroecosystems. The BEESPOKE approach empowers land managers to adopt pollinator management as a routine practice, fostering a bottom-up approach, creating a legacy to ensure continuing improvements for insect pollination of food crops in the future.”



Creating farmland homes for wild bees

Background information

The BEESPOKE project participated in the EU CAP Network workshop 'Promoting pollinator-friendly farming' on 18-19 June 2024 in Ljubljana, Slovenia. The aim of the event was to support sustainable agriculture by sharing innovative pollinator-friendly farming practices and systems that promote knowledge exchange and cooperation between different actors in this field.

[EU CAP Network workshop 'Promoting pollinator-friendly farming'](#) took place on 18 and 19 June 2024. This event aimed to support sustainable agriculture by sharing innovative pollinator-friendly farming practices and systems that promote knowledge exchange and cooperation between different actors in this field.

The EU and pollinators: The [EU Pollinators Initiative and Nature Restoration Law](#) (a key element of the EU Biodiversity Strategy and of the European Green Deal). The goal is to reverse the decline of wild pollinators in Europe by 2030.

[Progress in the implementation of the EU Pollinators Initiative](#) highlights that around 80% of crop and wild-flowering plants depend on animal pollination.

- > Project website: [BEESPOKE, Interreg VB North Sea Region Programme](#)
- > [BEESPOKE in three minutes video](#)
- > [Selecting seed mixes guides](#)
- > [Twitter](#)
- > [LinkedIn](#)
- > [Facebook](#)
- > [Instagram](#)

Project information

Coordinator: John Holland
beespokensrproject@gmail.com

**Communication manager:
Jan-Willem van Kruyssen**
jw@vankruyssen.eu

EU CAP Network contact

Ina Van Hoyer
Communication manager
Support Facility 'Innovation & Knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI'
ina.vanhoye@eucapnetwork.eu
+32 486 90 77 43

Creating farmland homes for wild bees

Project photos:

Click on the pictures to download the high-resolution versions. The pictures are free for use, please mention the copyright.



Demonstrating the benefits of the BEESPOKE wildflower seed mixes - © BEESPOKE



Pollinator on a flower in a BEESPOKE flower strip - © BEESPOKE



BEESPOKE flower strip in Belgium - © BEESPOKE



John Holland - © BEESPOKE

Please feel free to use this press article and the pictures in your own publications and to inform your colleagues. If you would like to receive all EU CAP Network press articles directly, please fill in the [subscription form](#).

Creating farmland homes for wild bees

More information on pollinator-friendly farming

EU CAP Network 'Innovation & knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI' activities

Focus Groups

- [EU CAP Network Focus Group: Enhancing the biodiversity on farmland through high-diversity landscape features](#)
- [EIP-AGRI Focus Group: High Nature Value \(HNV\) - Farming profitability](#)
- [EIP-AGRI Focus Group: Bee health and sustainable beekeeping](#)
- [EIP-AGRI Focus Group: Optimising profitability of crop production through Ecological Focus Areas](#)

Events

- [EU CAP Network workshop 'Promoting pollinator-friendly farming' \(2024\)](#)
- [EIP-AGRI Workshop Conversion to organic farming \(2024\)](#)
- [EIP-AGRI seminar: Healthy soils for Europe: sustainable management through knowledge and practice \(2024\)](#)
- [EIP-AGRI Workshop Cropping for the future: networking for crop rotation and crop diversification \(2024\)](#)

Publications & videos

- [Thematic newsletter on pollinator-friendly farming, published May 2024](#)
- [Thematic newsletter on biodiversity, published May 2023](#)
- [EIP-AGRI Brochure Organic farming: Innovative approaches to support conversion](#)
- [EIP-AGRI Brochure Sustainable and resilient farming: Inspiration from agro-ecology](#)
- [EIP-AGRI Brochure Cooperating for genetic resources](#)
- [AGRI challenge: Biodiversity - 14 September 2022](#)
- [AGRI challenge: Monitoring bee health through beehive sensors](#)

Inspirational ideas from the network

- [Inspirational Ideas: Protecting farmland pollinators - IE](#)
- [Inspirational ideas: A hive of digital activity - BG](#)

Operational Groups working on pollinator-friendly farming

100 Operational Groups working on pollinators are available in the [EIP-AGRI project database](#) (May 2024 update)

Horizon multi-actor projects working on pollinator-friendly farming

- [PoshBee](#) Support healthy bee populations, sustainable beekeeping and pollination across Europe
- [BeeGuards](#) Strengthen the resilience of the European beekeeping sector
- [EuropaBON](#) Europa Biodiversity Observation Network
- [RestPoll](#) Restoring Pollinator habitats across European agricultural landscapes based on multi-actor participatory approaches
- [BioMonitor4CAP](#) Advanced biodiversity monitoring for results-based and effective agricultural policy and transformation
- [iPollinate](#) Intelligent Pollination for Sustainable Increases in Crop Yields and Global Food Security
- [B-THENET Thematic Network](#) A digital platform for European beekeepers. The goal is to collect good beekeeping practices and innovations and share them (in 15 languages) among beekeepers, advisors, and other stakeholders

Multi-actor projects are research and innovation projects in which end-users and multipliers of research results such as farmers and farmers' groups, advisors, enterprises and others, cooperate closely throughout the whole project. Operational Groups are strongly encouraged to participate in this type of research project.

Thematic networks are multi-actor projects which collect existing knowledge and best practices on a given theme to make it available in easily understandable formats for end-users such as farmers, foresters, advisors etc.

Read the [Innovation & knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI Newsletter from May 2024](#) which focused on **pollinator-friendly farming**

Creating farmland homes for wild bees

Innovation, knowledge exchange and EIP-AGRI events 2023-2024

- > **Brokerage event**, March - April 2025
- > **2 Focus Group** meetings on:
 - > Production of protein crops under climate change, 20-21 November 2024
 - > Local perennial plant genetic resources in view of climate change and biodiversity loss, 27-28 November 2024
 - > Alternative solutions for sustainable livestock product differentiation, 20-21 November 2024
- > **Workshop**: National Networking for innovation and Knowledge exchange, January 2025
- > **Workshop**: Circular bioeconomy - Valorisation of forestry by-products and residues, March 2025
- > **Workshop**: Innovation in logistics to improve the position of farmers in a supply chain, May 2025
- > **Seminar**: Robotics and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in farming and forestry, February 2025
- > **Seminar**: Demonstration farms, June 2025
- > **3 cross-visits**, March - April 2025
- > **Ad-hoc experts meeting**, June 2025

Related videos



[AGRI challenge: Biodiversity](#)



[AGRI challenge: Monitoring bee health through beehive sensors](#)

The Common Agricultural Policy 2023-2027

Find [information on the common agricultural policy 2023-2027 on the European Commission's website](#).

Innovation, knowledge exchange and EIP-AGRI in the EU CAP Network

The new European CAP Network 'Support Facility for Innovation & Knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI' acts as a mediator, enhancing communication and cooperation between everyone with a keen interest in innovation and sharing knowledge for sustainable agriculture, forestry and rural areas.

The European Innovation Partnership 'Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability' (EIP-AGRI) was launched in 2013 by the European Commission in a bid to promote rapid modernisation of the sectors by efforts to step up innovation. The EIP-AGRI aims

to foster innovation in the agricultural and forestry sectors and in rural areas by bringing research and practice closer together - in innovation projects as well as via the European CAP Network and the national CAP Networks. Also, grassroots ideas from farmers are developed into concrete innovative solutions through 'Operational Group' innovation projects. The EIP-AGRI aims to streamline, simplify and better coordinate existing instruments and initiatives, and complement them with actions where necessary.

[Common agricultural policy 2023-27.](#)

Creating farmland homes for wild bees

EIP-AGRI Operational Groups

EIP-AGRI Operational Groups **are groups of people who work together in an innovation project**. They bring together partners with complementary knowledge. The composition of the group will vary according to the theme and specific objectives of each project. Farmers, advisors, scientists, businesses or other relevant partners work together to find practical solutions for specific problems or opportunities for European farmers and foresters. Farmers and foresters need to cooperate throughout the project to ensure that the innovative solutions are practical and likely to be quickly applied in the field. Read the [basic principles](#), [Innovation support services](#) (including advisers with a focus on innovation), and in particular innovation brokering, can therefore play a crucial role in getting worthwhile projects off the ground by facilitating contacts.

Operational Groups funded under Rural Development Programmes 2014-2022

- 98 Rural Development Programmes 2014-2020 (RDPs) provide support to innovative EIP-AGRI Operational Group projects.
- More than 3200 Operational Group projects have been notified in the common EU data repository and are currently ongoing (or already finished).^{*} Member States will still start more Operational Group projects which may run until 2025 (under current transitional rules for EU Rural Development Programmes). Find information on all these projects in the [EIP-AGRI project database](#).

Operational Groups funded under CAP Strategic Plans 2023 - 2027

Within the common agricultural policy 2023-27 (CAP), the EU Member States have designed national CAP Strategic Plans combining funding for income support, rural development, and market measures. All CAP Strategic Plans have been adopted and their implementation started on 1 January 2023.

26 CAP Strategic Plans include support for innovative EIP-AGRI Operational Groups. In total, 6600 EIP-AGRI Operational Group projects have been planned.

^{*} May 2023