

**Stephanie Mandel**  
**Special to The Union**

Back to:  
March 4, 2014

## Buzz on honey bees



Photo for The Union by John Hart

- [⏪](#)
- 1 of 1 images
- [⏩](#)

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The first month of spring is here, and early flowers are already blooming here and there. These flowers bring bees, which makes it a good time for us to remember that we depend on bees for much more than honey.

The life cycle of many fruits, vegetables and nuts is completely dependent upon bees and other pollinators. The honey bee is the primary pollinating species for most of our food crops, and native species of other bees and insects are also essential.

In fact, without them, 70 percent of our edible plants would be unable to reproduce and provide food. According to the United Nations Environment Programme, of the 100 crop varieties that provide 90 percent of the world's food, 71 are pollinated by bees.

In North America, honey bees alone pollinate nearly 95 kinds of fruits, such as almonds, avocados, cranberries, and apples, in addition to commodity crops like soy. The health of these pollinators is directly linked to the continuance of our country's food supply.

Over the past decade, an alarming decline in honey bee populations has been documented world-wide. Dozens of peer-reviewed scientific studies have been published that link this decline in bee populations to pesticide use.

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According to the Center for Food Safety, these studies “illustrate the overwhelming effects that toxic chemicals are having not just on honey bees, but also on native bees and other critical beneficial insects.”

In response, The Center and Beyond Pesticides have launched the “BEE Protective Campaign,” which is aimed at protecting honey bees and other pollinators from pesticides.

The BEE Protective Campaign provides tools to help us protect honey bees and other pollinators right in our own community.

The Center's website has a downloadable fact sheet, a list of bee-toxic garden products to avoid, and a list of bee-friendly plants to choose from. To give us even more in-depth information, it offers a 20-page report on pollinators and pesticides.

The Center's website also invites us all to take a pledge to protect bees in our own homes and gardens by taking concrete steps that make us part of the solution to the decline in bee numbers.

One obvious way we can all help keep pesticides out of the environment is to support organic food production by buying organically grown food.

The problem of bee depopulation has caught the attention of independent filmmakers, and some beautiful films explore the subject with depth and beauty.

One of these is “More Than Honey,” which was shown last week at BriarPatch Co-op. The winner of a number of film festival awards, it can be purchased online for \$12.99.

Other excellent films include “Queen of the Sun: What Are the Bees Telling Us?,” “BEE,” and “The Quest for Local Honey,” which was made right here in Nevada County. All of these have been shown at the South Yuba River Citizens' League Wild and Scenic Film Festival in recent years, and are in SYRCL's film lending library and available for SYRCL members to borrow free

of charge. For more information, go to [www.wildandscenicfilmfestival.org/film-library/](http://www.wildandscenicfilmfestival.org/film-library/). If you're really interested in bees, the Nevada County Beekeepers Association welcomes everyone to attend their monthly educational programs, which are at 7 p.m. the first Monday of each month at the Veterans Hall in Grass Valley. Their website is being updated, so for more information, contact Leslie Gault at 346-7092.

Stephanie Mandel is the marketing manager for BriarPatch Co-op in Grass Valley. Learn more at [www.briarpatch.coop](http://www.briarpatch.coop).

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