



For Immediate Release

Hay and Oats: Rock stars of Manitoba's Pollinator Conservation

Flowering habitat for pollinators bolstered as General Mills Cheerios Program works Manitoba buzz

Winnipeg, Mb (Aug 3, 2017) – An international General Mills Cheerios program that provides free flower seed for prairie producers to bring back the pollinators has hit the hay and oat fields of Manitoba. And, project leaders say, they're looking for more growers and more fields.

"We want to conserve wild bees and butterflies," says Jim Eckberg, plant ecologist/agronomist for the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation, who is leading the program with General Mills. "Primarily, we are targeting oat growers for uptake on our program. Oats are a major ingredient of Cheerios and this initiative aims to bring back pollinators to farms growing oats. We also are looking for other conservation-minded Manitoba producers who want diverse crop rotations and conservation practices on their farm and are willing to plant wildflowers and-or flowering forage mixtures. Those attributes would seem to be a good fit with many of the forage and oat producers in Manitoba and we hope to hear from those who might be interested."

Eckberg says that mainstay Manitoba crops such as alfalfa and canola rely on bees and other insects for pollination and that grazing lands can also be enhanced with forage legumes that will draw pollinators. He says the program is looking for growers that are committed to maintaining plantings for at least three to five years on lands with a full range of sizing potential from ten acres upward.

"The seed mix the General Mills program offers is flexible to the grower's needs by taking into account what seed will best help the grower meet their agronomic goals and area they can dedicate while providing meaningful habitat for bees," says Eckberg. "We have been consulting Agriculture Agri-Food Canada and Imperial Seed for seed species and plant expertise specific to Manitoba."

The potential for producers to be part of the pollinator solution is what drew Manitoba Forage and Grasslands Association (MFGA) to help promote the program.

"Many of our producers are constantly looking at ways to improve soil health and diversify crop rotations as a part of their everyday farm operations," says Duncan Morrison, MFGA executive director. "This is a cool win-win-win program for any of our producers to be aware of and potentially participate in."

One possible site for the General Mills program may be the Manitoba Beef and Forage Initiatives research farm near Brandon, Mb where a new learning centre is slated for construction this summer. Eckberg says the draw of any additional audiences – especially school kids and urban audiences -- to

hear the story of producers working for pollinators can never be underestimated. In fact, he says, word of mouth is vital to the program's success.

"We are hoping to engage growers who are enthusiastic to share their story with friends, family, neighbors, and others who care about pollinators," he says.

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[Cheerios' Flier: free flower seed for farmers to bring back the pollinators](#)