

MEDIA RELEASE



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Heikes Family Farm (Vermillion, SD) picks-up national sward for CSA and farm management that helps to feed the bees.

The NAPPC-NACD Farmer-Rancher Pollinator Award recognizes individuals who have contributed significantly to pollinator protection, conservation, and issue outreach resulting in increased awareness of the importance of pollinators and pollination within the agricultural community. This special award sheds light on the contributions of American farmers to natural and cultural resource preservation.

Sam Heikes and his daughter Heidi have been farming land that has been in their family since the 1900's with a suitable model that puts the science of crop manage first. Sam Heikes has always worked with techniques that were developed through science and understanding of ecosystem functions and the way in which economics can make or break diversified farming systems. Sam's motivation to support sustainable agriculture in the plains all started with sunflowers. Trained as an agronomist, Sam knew how to design cropping systems that were resilient to pests, produced high yields, and provided other ecological benefits. Within the wheat fields of South Dakota, efforts to improve crop yields and reduce pest infestations were being hampered by government programs that imposed production limits and crop restrictions. Sunflowers benefit wheat in many ways, and planting sunflowers after a wheat harvest would provide soil benefits and food to beneficial species like bees. Sam's work with colleague Don Leiblow help to remove these restrictions was successful, and now South Dakota is the number one sunflower producer in the US – and sunflowers are helping to feed the bees by providing a pollen source.

Today Sam works closely with his daughter Heidi promoting suitable farming and growing through a community support agriculture (CSA) program that provides wonderful benefits, including the first batch of honey, to members that register early in the year. As shareholders, all CSA members receive two 1 lb containers of honey harvested from the hives kept on the farm property. Members are made aware of the benefits afforded by local pollinators, not only in the fruits and vegetables that regularly come in their shares, but also in the allergy reducing quality of the honey produced on the farm.

Tours on the farm are done on a regular basis, allowing participants to view all of production acreage, a butterfly alley, multiple wetlands, CRP acres, and the constantly buzzing hives. An annual event is hosted in the spring, where the general public can view all of the conservation benefits of the property, a significant emphasis being placed on the efforts to promote pollinators in the area. Shareholders support the operation not only because of the valued produce that they receive in their share, but also because of efforts that benefit the region as a whole. In an area traditionally known for agricultural operations that focus on a soybean and corn rotation almost exclusively, small production areas such as the Heikes Family Farm provide islands of crucial habitat with diverse plants available for a range of pollinators. While the focus of the operation is on the production of produce for the shareholders in the membership, the Heikes Family Farm recognizes that the direct efforts to support pollinators is a win-win-win for the business, the consumers, and the region as a whole.

The Heikes' achievements will be celebrated at a VIP reception held at the USDA Whitten Patio in Washington D.C. on October 21, 2014. They will share the evening spotlight with the 2014 Canadian Farmer-Rancher award winner Takota Coen (Ferintosh, Alberta), who has also made use of community support agriculture to educate the public about the importance of pollinators in agriculture and with Tri-National Pollinator Advocate Award Winners Sustainable.TO (Canada), The American Bee Project (USA) Dr. Pablo F. Jaramillo (Mexico).

Without pollinators we would lose one third of our diet, nearly all of our high-nutrient food, most terrestrial ecosystems would collapse, important plant species that provide the raw materials for medicines would die out, and the biosphere would stop filtering air and freshwater for us and other wildlife. Factors such as uncontrolled development, agricultural intensification, chemical misuse, and pathogen introduction are decimating their populations. The Pollinator Partnership recognizes the important role that these award winners play in ensuring a healthy future for pollinator populations, as a benefit to current and future generations.

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NAPPC is a collaborative effort of over 120 organizations in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico whose common goal is to promote awareness of the essential role that pollinators play in food systems and ecosystems, and to provide the public with simple, effective ways to engage in environmental stewardship.

The **Pollinator Partnership**, the largest organization in the world dedicated to the protection and promotion of pollinators and their ecosystems, is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization headquartered in San Francisco. Pollinator Partnership has offices and activities in Washington D.C., Louisiana, Nebraska, Iowa, Montana, Ohio, Arizona, Washington, and Canada.

The **National Association of Conservation Districts** (NACD) is the nonprofit organization that represents America's 3,000 conservation districts and the 17,000 men and women who serve on their governing boards. Conservation districts are local units of government established under state law to carry out natural resource management programs at the local level. Districts work with millions of cooperating landowners and operators to help them manage and protect land and water resources on all private lands and many public lands in the United States.



The Pollinator Advocate Award designed by acclaimed artist James Randolph.