



## Get Involved with Seeds for Bees®!

### Apply for Free or Discounted Cover Crop Seed

Stetcyn Maldonado, Project *Apis m.*

In a world of impact savvy customers, getting the Bee Friendly Farming certification demonstrates that you and your farm are actively working to promote bee health. This sought after accreditation can help your produce stand out in competitive markets. Additionally, many large chain stores have announced future goals which will require sustainable and bee friendly practices from their vendors.

Among the requirements to qualify for the Bee Friendly Farming certification, farmers must provide pollinator forage on at least 3% of their land. This forage can be temporary, which can make cover crops a perfect opportunity for your farm.

Starting a new cover crop program on the farm can seem daunting and expensive. That is why Seeds for Bees, a program run by Project *Apis m.* was created. The Seeds for Bees program was founded to supply farmers with free or subsidized cover crop mixes with free shipping and free advising. This year, first time applicants will receive up to \$2,500 in free seed and second year applicants will receive up to \$1,500 in seed. The August 31<sup>st</sup> deadline is fast approaching, interested participants should consider applying soon.

There are only a few requirements to be eligible for this program. Applicants need to be located in California, be able to plant 4 or more acres of cover crop, and either grow or be located near bee pollinated crops.

A variety of on-farm benefits can be attributed to the use of cover crops. Below ground, cover crops can improve soil conditions by loosening compacted soil, increasing organic matter, improving water infiltration, increasing microbial diversity, and depending on variety, can reduce pest nematode populations. One study showed that soil compaction could be reduced by 41% with the use of cover crops in almond orchards (Wauters & et al., 2023).

Above ground cover crop biomass has been shown to suppress weeds, slow soil water evaporation, and increase biodiversity, such as by increasing populations of predatory insects. In annual row crops, cover crop residue has been found to be as effective in

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reducing weed seed germination as mechanical and chemical controls (Wauters & et al., 2023).

Seeds for Bees cover crop blends are designed to make the most of the benefits provided by this practice in addition to supplying forage for bees. Having blooming crops ready when the bees arrive in almond orchards help colonies build up, increasing their pollination workforce. Additionally, honeybees face a number of health issues. These are known as the 4 Ps: pathogens, parasites, poor nutrition, and pesticides. More recently, extreme weather events, such as drought or damaging storms, have also impacted bee health by reducing available forage.

Research has shown that when bees are provided with enough high-quality food, such as blooming cover crops, they can more easily fight off these stressors. Bees that had access to available and diverse nutrition were healthier and more likely to survive the winter (Fenton & Goodrich, 2023). Cover crops are a win-win for growers and for bees! If you are interested in giving cover crops a try and you meet the program criteria apply to Seeds for Bees. You can access the application by going to Project *Apis m.*'s website and clicking the Seeds for Bees tab: [www.projectapism.org/apply-to-enroll](http://www.projectapism.org/apply-to-enroll)

Sources:

Wauters, V. & et al., (2023) Developing cover crop systems for California almonds: Current knowledge and uncertainties. *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation*

Fenton, M. & Goodrich, B. (2023) Economic considerations of growing bee friendly cover crops in almond orchards: Grower and beekeeper perspectives. *University of California, Giannini Foundation for Agricultural Economics*



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