



## Operation Bumblebee News

Spring 2008

# OPERATION BUMBLEBEE – RESPECT FOR THE ENVIRONMENT



## Sainsbury's growers take stake in bumblebee revival

Thousands of endangered bumblebees have been saved, thanks to the initiative of Sainsbury's fruit, vegetable, salad and potato growers involved with Operation Bumblebee. Thanks to an extensive training and advice network, provided by Syngenta Crop Protection, more than 150 of their growers have already successfully established over 240 hectares of Pollen & Nectar Mix habitat, especially designed to provide crucial food sources for bumblebees and other insects.



Extensive research has shown bumblebee numbers can increase by up to 600% in the early years of habitat creation – equivalent to thousands of extra bees per hectare.

The science is borne out by the practical experiences of growers, who report the

Operation Bumblebee Pollen & Nectar Mix areas have been buzzing with insect life this season. With more of the Sainsbury's suppliers committed to establishing Operation Bumblebee habitat over the coming seasons, the bumblebee looks set to have a secure future on British farms.

This newsletter brings you the views and comments of some leading UK growers and businesses involved in Operation Bumblebee

## Operation Bumblebee brings *Bombus* back

Operation Bumblebee habitat on a Vitacress farm in Hampshire has resurrected the region's first recorded colony of *Bombus Ruderatus* bumblebee for 50 years. Previously believed to have become extinct from the area, the discovery has set the ecology community buzzing.

Leading bumblebee expert and Syngenta Operation Bumblebee advisor, Mike Edwards, reported the findings to a BBC News TV crew. "We were absolutely amazed, it was brilliant. The first sightings for 50 years, and here we have a small area of habitat, supporting three or four nests; it's a highly significant discovery."

Pinglestone Farm Manager, Andy Elworthy, added: "To find a bumblebee that hasn't been seen for 50 years makes the effort all the more worthwhile." He highlights that while the interest and excitement has focused on the *Bombus Ruderatus*, the areas dedicated by Vitacress for improving biodiversity and looking after the environment also play host to a vast array of other insect and wildlife.

Capturing the world's first video footage of *Bombus Ruderatus* was equally exciting for the South Today film crew, creating an extended feature on the evening news. To view the BBC video visit:

<http://tinyurl.com/2exewp>



Vitacress farm managers and staff are undertaking Operation Bumblebee training to get the best out of the company's environmental management initiatives (above left).



Already their efforts have made a huge impact, with the exciting return of *Bombus Ruderatus* (above right). Photo courtesy Mike Edwards ©

## Consumer connections

Operation Bumblebee has added immensely to the Sainsbury's fresh produce revival, according to Sainsbury's Agronomist and Bumblebee Ambassador, Debbie Winstanley. "It gives customers a real chance to connect with the countryside and the fields where their food is produced." Debbie believes the linkage between Sainsbury's, Syngenta and the retailers' growers creates an incredible opportunity to make a real difference for biodiversity – with immense PR possibilities for UK growers to secure a strong relationship with their customers.



Pictured with Debbie are potato growers Eaun and Peter Grewar (left), along with Paddy Graham-Jones of Albert Bartlett's

## Leading edge through the environment

Philip Effingham, Technical Director of Marshall Bros, Europe's largest brassica growers and Sainsbury category lead, has been inspired by the company's pioneering involvement in Operation Bumblebee for the past two years. He instigated the initial meetings with Sainsbury's and has championed the cause throughout.

"Operation Bumblebee gives us the platform to demonstrate excellent environmental stewardship that has direct affinity with our customers and the public," he says. "As a business that thrives on innovation, we have always sought to give our customers an edge through the adoption of new technology and ideas; Operation Bumblebee certainly gives us that edge. We have seen the environmental benefits and know what can be achieved. Now we are seeking to gain the business benefits as well."

Philip reports Marshalls have planted more than 14 hectares of Operation Bumblebee Pollen & Nectar Mix over the past two years, and plan to increase areas where suitable sites are identified. He highlights this has been accommodated by sowing the habitat on the least productive field areas. "In effect there has been very little loss of productivity from the fields, in fact economically it may have actually improved returns by taking out the least productive spots that would not have been generating a profit."

## Habitats come to fruition



Sainsbury's Director Judith Batchelor, with Kent fruit grower Peter Hall

The Operation Bumblebee project dovetails perfectly into the pro-active environmental initiatives of Kent fruit growers HE Hall & Son. A comprehensive environment restoration programme has successfully seen habitats created to safeguard partridges, skylarks, owls and even otters. Bumblebees are the latest species to see their future safely secured.

"Red clover is an integral part of fertility building for the farm's soils, as well as providing a superb source of nectar for bumblebees and a huge increase in food availability for insect-eating birds," reports Peter Hall. "We have been

astounded at how, with the right management, new habitats will quickly become colonised."

Peter is pioneering many concepts of modern fruit growing technology, alongside the traditional techniques employed on the 125 ha family farm for four generations – including fully automated weather recording and pheromone trapping to predict pest and disease pressures and enable more timely and appropriate action.

**Sainsbury packer processor groups and growers that will be involved with Operation Bumblebee include:**

Category	Category Managers	OBB members	Ha's OBB mix sown
Potatoes	Bartletts	19	38
	GVAP	14	9
Brassicas	Marshalls	12	14
	Mack	19	20
	Kettle	4	3.5
	SEF	2	2
Carrots & parsnips	Kettle/Strawsons	6	12
	Hunter Pack	2	1
Parsnips	IFP	4	4.5
Onions	Rustler	12	23
	Beds Growers	10	16.5
Leeks	Allpress Bros	1	2
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>105</b>	<b>145.5</b>
<b>All other crops</b>		<b>45</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>150</b>	<b>241.5</b>



**Marshalls have planted more than 14 hectares of Operation Bumblebee Pollen & Nectar Mix, says Philip Effingham.**

Operation Bumblebee was instigated by Syngenta in 2005 as a means to help growers revive the precarious position of farmland Bumblebee populations - primarily as a result of habitat loss. The Buzz Project had identified that, if growers put the habitat back, bumblebees and other insects could quickly recover.

With Operation Bumblebee growers are committed to establishing a hectare of the specially designed clover-based seed mixture and to manage the area to ensure maximum availability of pollen and nectar for foraging insects. In return growers receive:

- Training at a specialist Syngenta Environmental training centre
- Operation Bumblebee Guide Pack
- Topical in season updates
- Telephone Helpdesk Support
- Web Site
- Field ID guide
- Meetings at key times through the season
- Training video

**For further information visit the Operation Bumblebee web site: [www.operationbumblebee.co.uk](http://www.operationbumblebee.co.uk)**

## Benefits for all biodiversity

The benefits of the Operation Bumblebee Pollen & Nectar mix for all biodiversity on the farms of environmental award winning growers, G's Marketing, have been fantastic, reports the company's Lyndsey Rolfe. They have recorded a huge surge in the number of bumblebees and butterflies, spiders and many other beneficial insects have all increased, with the added bonus that when in flower, the mix looks fantastic!

"Historically we have had many problems when trying to establish pollen and nectar mix on fen soils. However, with the support from Operation Bumblebee we now have nine plots ranging from 0.1ha-0.5ha successfully scattered across the farm."

By placing the mix in awkward field corners, or on heavier land where they wouldn't tend to grow salad crops, Lyndsey believes it has proved to be an excellent example of how conservation measures can be integrated with intensive salad and vegetable production.

## Potato growers get environmental buzz

W P Bruce Ltd, based in Meigle, Perthshire, grow around 170 hectares of potatoes, along with 150 hectares of fruit including strawberries, raspberries, blueberries and blackcurrants, and in excess of 200 hectares of vining peas and beans.

The company's Lucy Stewart said: "Bees play an important role in the pollination of many our crops, so we are keen to do all we can to encourage their activity through environmental projects and sensitive farming practices."

"If we can replicate trials results on a field scale across the farm, it could have a significant beneficial impact on the farm's biodiversity, as well as the advantages it could bring with marketing our crops to consumers," she added. "Establishing Bumblebee habitat on our farms is a win for all parties involved."



**Operation Bumblebee should further enhance the environmental features for bees and a host of other beneficial insects, reports Lucy Stewart**

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