

Sainsbury's
Try something new today



Contact: Helen Prince, Sainsbury's
Telephone: 020 7695 6916

Sainsbury's growers bring back the British bumblebee

** A rare bumblebee species returns after 50 years **

** Number of British bumblebees boosted by up to 600% **

Thousands of endangered bumblebees have been saved thanks to the work of Sainsbury's fruit, vegetable, salad and potato growers who have all been part of a project aimed at boosting the number of UK bumblebees by 600%.

Known as 'Operation Bumblebee', the three-year project launched last Spring with Syngenta has already seen farmland buzzing with insect life one year on. The most significant sighting during the first year has been the return of the magnificent species '*Bombus ruderatus*', on the Worcestershire farm of vegetable growers, Paul and Mike Southall. This rare bee species has been classified on the verge of extinction, and a key target in the Government's initiative to protect and resurrect UK farmland biodiversity.

"The results we have seen on our farm has been incredibly exciting," enthuses Mike Southall. "The Operation Bumblebee wildflower habitats are full of colour and teeming with insect life. The speed at which bumblebees and other insects have colonised even small areas of dedicated habitat is quite remarkable.

“We are very proud of what we have achieved with Operation Bumblebee and the way that we manage the environment alongside our food production. Finding such a rare species as *Bombus ruderatus* makes it even more worthwhile.”

The increase in bumblebee life is a direct result of over 100 Sainsbury’s growers sowing a specially-designed bumblebee seed mix into areas of their farmland. The seed mix, which has now been sown over a collective area of 500 acres, contains vital pollen and nectar, which is crucial for the survival of bumblebees and other insects.

Independent research of the Operation Bumblebee habitat has shown growers can increase bumblebee populations by up to 600% in just three years by providing the essential food sources and undisturbed nesting sites.

Leading independent bumblebee expert and Operation Bumblebee advisor, Mike Edwards, said: “The first year of Operation Bumblebee has been very successful, and to have resurrected a bumblebee that hasn’t been seen on a farm for 50 years is a highly significant discovery. With a further 20 to 30 Sainsbury’s farmers coming on board to sow the bumblebee mix this year, the British bumblebee looks set to have a more secure future on UK farms”

Debbie Winstanley, Sainsbury’s bumblebee ambassador and agricultural specialist, says: “The increase of bumblebees and other insects on UK farmland is an amazing result - thanks to all our fruit and vegetable growers. Sainsbury’s customers care about the environment in which their food is grown and at a very small cost this project demonstrates how sustainable, food production and a vibrant countryside can sit side by side.”

Over the last 30 years the humble bumblebee has been in steady decline and recent research shows their populations are down by a worrying 70%. Already three of the 25 species traditionally found in the UK have become

extinct and conservationists fear several more are in imminent danger if action is not taken quickly.

As well as increasing the population of bumblebees, other wildlife, including butterflies, bugs, farmland birds and small mammals will also benefit.

Bumblebees are an excellent indicator of greater farmland bio diversity (wildlife) but also help many beneficial insects such as ladybirds that have a positive effect in reducing pest numbers in field crops.

HOW IT WORKS:

Sainsbury's and Syngenta are working closely with farmers and growers encouraging them to establish new habitats for bumblebees on their farms by sowing and managing 'field boundaries' and other uncropped areas within their fields. Using a unique seed mix, these new habitats will produce a selection of plants and wild flowers which deliver a consistent supply of pollen and nectar vital for bumblebees to thrive.

The exclusive project trains farmers and growers, in the new skills required to manage the new Bumblebee habitat. This follows a successful pilot project, which included Marshalls Bros, one of Sainsbury's largest green vegetable suppliers. It is based on five years of scientific research initiated by Syngenta to create the ideal environment for bumblebees to prosper.

Operation Bumblebee is one of many projects Sainsbury's is looking at to support rural and farming communities across the UK and creates valuable environmental habitats to encourage biodiversity.