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Bee Better on the Road to Peru

From Cameron Newell - Bee Better Certified Program Manager

With a growing market for Bee Better Certified products and consumers expecting their favorite fruit and vegetables to be on supermarket shelves year round, our partners are increasingly looking outside of US borders to source Bee Better certified crops. This is particularly true for the produce industry.

This demand has prompted many companies outside of the US as well as US based companies that source from Mexico, Central and South America to encourage us to grow our program into these regions.

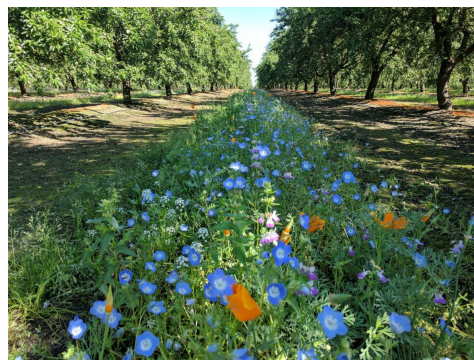
So when the United States Highbush Blueberry Council presented our team with the opportunity to travel to Peru and tour some major players' in the South American produce industries farms, we jumped at the opportunity.

The trip gave us valuable insights into the state of play with agriculture in Peru, as well as some important history and context for it's rapid growth in the country. We gained valuable insights into the sustainability initiatives of the industry and learnt how our program could add value to the industry and the environment of the region. We also had a chance to connect in person with local NGO partners, building critical foundations for continued growth.

New Project Through CDFA PHP

Funding

The Xerces Society's Living Farms Team recently secured a round of funding under the California Department of Food and Agriculture's (CDFA) new Pollinator Habitat Program (PHP). The funding will allow the team to accelerate habitat work in California with an exciting cohort of new and existing partners.



The funding will allow the team to establish 15 linear miles of pollinator hedgerows and 400 acres of diverse flowering pollinator-focused cover crops with at least 13 farm partners in the Central and San Joaquin valleys and the Central Coast. These farm operations include tree nuts, small fruit, wine grapes, as well as additional annual row cropping and perennial systems.

Through the use of drought-resilient native plant species, this work will have long-term impacts, from the use of native wildflowers in diverse cover crops seed mixes designed to deliver multi-year reseeding, to hedgerow plantings with an anticipated lifespan of at least a century.

Certification Spotlight: Firestone Pacific Foods

Located in Vancouver, Washington, [Firestone Pacific Foods](#) farming operation is undergoing their Bee Better Certified inspection and audit this fall. Their farm, where they grow blackberries and blueberries, is nestled in the rich alluvial soils of the Columbia River and Vancouver lake.



This spring Firestone installed native flowering hedgerow habitat on over 32,000 square feet of the farm, and this fall they are seeding another 21,000 square feet as a permanent native pollinator meadow.

The hedgerows they installed in the spring contain a mix of native shrubs and forbs including vine maple, elderberry and bigleaf lupine. The diverse seed mix contains a mix of native annual and perennial wildflowers that will provide blooms throughout the year to help feed a diversity of native pollinators, honey bees, and native beneficial insects at the farm.

The site also has a large remnant wooded habitat in the center of the crop fields, and with help from the city, the farm management team has worked to remove invasive species such as Himalayan blackberry and English ivy from the wooded area. The removal of these noxious weeds has helped existing native plants spread, including snowberry, native trailing blackberry, and osoberry. The stand is also home to several large Oregon white oaks, white oak woodlands are designated as a priority habitat in Washington State.

New Staff Introductions

We are pleased to announce two new staff members to the Bee Better Certified team! Based in California, Lea and Bernardo will help expand our pollinator habitat work with growers throughout California and the west coast.



Lea Van Es is a Pollinator Habitat Specialist based out of the Southern Central Valley in California where her work supports farmers and growers in implementing pollinator friendly habitat to promote native species and beneficial insects.

Before coming to Xerces, Lea previously worked with an ag-tech startup that implemented in-hive technology to monitor honeybee activity during crop pollination.

She also has experience working with habitat restoration nonprofits throughout the Central Valley, managing invasive riparian species and promoting native habitat. She is excited to combine her experiences of working in agriculture and native plants in her role at Xerces.



Bernardo Niño (he/his) is a Pollinator Habitat Specialist in California. He supports Xerces' private-sector partners in designing and implementing cutting-edge conservation systems for bees and beneficial insects on farms across California. Bernardo received a Master's degree in Entomology from North Carolina State University (2009).

Before coming to Xerces, Bernardo worked with the Bureau of Land Management on their Seeds of Success project, along with other habitat restoration projects. More recently he spent 7 years working with the Bee Biology group at UC Davis leading projects on pesticide exposure to pollinators, implementing supplemental forage in almond orchards, determining honeybee hive stocking rates in self-fertile almond varieties. Then transitioned to a Support Scientist role for the USDA-ARS investigating effects of climate change on honeybee health and effects of different crop systems on honeybee hive performance and health.

Farewell Liz Robertson

After over six years at the Xerces Society, Liz Robertson is moving on to explore new opportunities in her career. Over the past few years Liz has been critical in the management of all things Bee Better Certified. Her dedicated work behind the

scenes and in the field has guided many facets of the program.

Liz, we wish you the best in your new endeavors. We will miss you!



For more information on Bee Better Certified
visit beebettercertified.org
or contact us directly:

Cameron Newell
Bee Better Certified Program Manager
cameron.newell@xerces.org

Eric Lee-Mäder
Pollinator and Agricultural Biodiversity Program, Co-Director
eric.mader@xerces.org

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Banner Photo: Cameron Newell
Inset: Jessa Kay-Cruz (cover crops); Josh Hinerfield (planting crew)

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The Xerces Society | 628 NE Broadway, Suite 200, Portland, OR 97232

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