

# PRESS



# RELEASE

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## **WEST SONOMA COUNTY GIRL SCOUTS AND LOCAL FARMERS JOIN TOGETHER TO SUPPORT “BEE PATCHES” OF FORAGE FOR POLLINATORS**

The non-profit North Coast Resource Conservation & Development Council (NCRC&DC) is planting “Bee Patches” of forage for pollinators working with 6 local West County Girl Scout troops, wineries, ranches and small family farms to create habitat in Western Sonoma County for struggling bees and other pollinators. Eighty percent of the world’s flowering plants require pollinators, and wildlife ecosystems and agricultural systems are vitally dependent on these small wildlife. Native bees and European honeybees help to maintain healthy productive plant communities which are essential to our planet, whether in increasing food crop production or fostering native plant forage to sustain wildlife in our local area.

Scientists and farmers alike are increasingly recognizing the importance of honeybees and native pollinators, and the reality that they are at risk. Our bees are disappearing, and one important action to help bees is to create forage habitat where these tiny creatures can feed and nourish their colonies. This fall, new habitat “Bee Patches” will be planted through a partnership with six Girl Scout troops and 6 local wineries, ranches and small family farms in rural areas surrounding Sebastopol and Forestville. The Girl Scouts will plan and design their “Bee Patch” and do the planting, then follow-up throughout the year on how well this bee forage planting effort works! Critical elements in the Troops’ plans include multi-season forage opportunities, water, undisturbed ground for wild bee nesting, and safety from pesticide exposure. Each participating troop will receive a \$250 donation for planting a patch.

Providing wildflower-rich habitat is one of the most significant actions people can take to help pollinators. Each “Bee Patch” planted in western Sonoma County will provide nourishing habitat using specialty seed mixes developed by LeBallister Seed Company to support bee forage. In previous years, LeBallister has reported selling over 1,300 pounds of Bee Forage Seed, and the NCRC&DC hopes this expands. Multi-season blooming species contained in the seed are critical to ensuring forage habitat to nourish bees throughout the year.

Oona Heacock, NCRC&DC conservationist directing the “Bee Patches” program, connects Girl Scout troops with West County farms, and this fall Beet Generation Farm and Kitchen, Confluence Farms, Two Belly Acres, Williams Ranch in Sebastopol, Apple-a-Day Ratzlaff Ranch and Hartford Family Winery in Forestville are planting habitat. “We work with Girl Scout troops to teach them the importance of pollinators at each farm site and then guide them on simple pollinator conservation steps to design their Bee Patch,” Heacock said. “The Girl Scouts seem naturally fascinated by the diversity, complexity and importance of bees to our farming systems and wildlife ecosystems, and once they learn that bee populations are in decline, they jump right in to these projects. The West County Girl Scouts are creating

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beautiful and creative Bee Patches that will add over 1,000 square feet of new pollinator habitat along Western Sonoma County farms this Fall.

Representatives of the Milo Baker chapter of the California Native Plant Society (CNPS) have picked out many of the plants for the Girl Scouts to use for their projects. “We believe this is an excellent opportunity to showcase the relationship between native plants and native bees. Our choices of plants are California natives providing year round blooms that are bee favorites for nectar and pollen.” Patricia Sesser of the CNPS said. “Examine native buckwheats and you will see hundreds of small bees buzzing around.”

The Planting Schedule is as follows:

Girl Scout Troop # 10022/10580 Girl Scout Seniors (ages 14-16) Williams Ranch, Sunday October 16th and Wednesday October 19th 3:30, 5498 Braehurst Lane, Sebastopol

Girl Scout Troop # 10555 Girl Scout Seniors (ages 14-16) Hartford Family Winery, Saturday October 29th, 10:00-1:00, 8075 Martinelli Road, Forestville

Girl Scout Troop # 10555 Girl Scout Juniors (ages 9-11) Two Belly Acres Farm, Saturday October 29th, 3:00-6:00, 4250 Bones Road, Sebastopol

Girl Scout Troop # 10207 Girl Scout Juniors and Cadettes (ages 11-13) Confluence Farms, Sunday November 6th 3:30-5:30, 9997 Green Valley Road, Sebastopol

Girl Scout Troop #10870 Girl Scout Juniors (ages 10-12) Beet Generation Farm, Tuesday November 8th, 3:15-5:00, 595 Snow Road, Sebastopol

Girl Scout Troop # 10175 Girl Scout Juniors (ages 9-10) Apple-a-Day Ratzlaff Ranch, November 13th, Time 10:00-2:00, 13128 Occidental Road, Sebastopol

Funding for these habitat plantings with youth groups in Western Sonoma County is provided by the Clif Bar Family Foundation, Jackson Family Wines, and other generous donors. The NCRC&DC is a local 501(c)3 non-profit organization working in Marin, Sonoma, Mendocino, and Lake Counties. The NCRC&DC’s overall goal is to protect water, soil, and air resources while enhancing sustainable communities. The all-volunteer NCRC&DC works to protect pollinator habitat, conserve water with “Rain Catchers in Your School,” encourage recycling literacy with “Vermicomposting in Your School,” promote new and expanding small agricultural entrepreneurship, and encourage use of biochar for improving soil health.

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