

Tour Objectives: To provide a direct and compelling experience of the progressive biodiversity enhancement practices that are driving sustainable agriculture forward in the 21st century, to provide access to scientists and other specialists who are helping us understand the importance of on-farm biodiversity for the quality and yield of agricultural crops, to identify some of the constraints that may limit the potential for the full benefits of these practices to be realized, and to provide relevant insights for future discussions on agricultural policies that encourage on-farm biodiversity.

Sponsors of the tour:

The USDA Western Region IPM Center Functional Agro-Biodiversity Work Group (FAB Work Group) members include:

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Mace Vaughan, Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation (Xerces), OR
Rex Dufour, Nat Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT), CA
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Biodiversity Working for Farmers Tour July 21, 2009 Corvallis, OR

A tour that brought regional policy makers, conservationists and industry personnel together with farmers and researchers to highlight the importance of agricultural biodiversity



What was done

Three established, ecologically rich Willamette Valley farms (totaling over 800 acres combined) were visited by 35 regional policy makers, regulators, industry personnel, conservationists and researchers. Farmers led the group to rich, bio-diverse areas of their farms highlighting the habitat enhancement practices they have implemented and their impacts on farm production, economic viability and quality of life for them and the future generation of farmers. Members from the USDA Western Region IPM Center Functional Agro-Biodiversity Work Group (the FAB Work Group), specialists in agricultural biodiversity from industry and non-profits and farmers that meet on a regular basis to develop and promote adoption of ecological practices in the western region, led discussions on other studied impacts of on-farm biodiversity such as biological pest management, increased native pollinator populations, farm resiliency to environmental degradation such as soil erosion and water quality and regional contributions to local agricultural sustainability.

What was learned

All three farmers, Peter Kenagy of Kenagy Family Farms, Jim Caulkin of Heavenly Harvest Farm, and Dave Buchanan of Buchanan Family Farm/Tyee Vineyard identified the following restraints they face while enhancing on-farm biodiversity:

- high costs in terms of time to plan and implement the practices, labor of creating and maintaining the habitats and land taken out of production for the habitat;
- very little regionally relevant information on the long-term impacts of these habitats on their farm production systems and ;
- scant technical information on what plant selections to make for optimal beneficial organism enhancement (i.e. insect predators, parasitoids, native pollinators, predator birds).

These farmers, masters, or soon to be masters, of conservation ecology and adapting practices to fit within their farm ecosystems and production systems do so because they strongly feel on-farm biodiversity can:

- improve the quality of their products or;
- create new, alternative farm products or;
- make their farm production systems more interesting or;
- support ecological product labels and certification or;
- conserve the biodiversity of the farm landscape and;
- preserve this biodiversity for our future generations.

A major conclusion made by both the participants and farmers alike is that increased communication among all represented should occur to identify and create new policy opportunities that support the conservation and promotion of on-farm biodiversity and fund the participatory research and technological development that supports its implementation on a regional level.