

Feature Story



A participant's perspective on the #MonarchChallenge

Successfully establish a milkweed plant within the first year

RESEARCH TRIANGLE PARK, NC, January 9, 2018 — Andy Herring's North Carolina farm grows acres of soybeans, wheat and corn, and commercially produces turkeys, along with a more recent addition – honeybees. According to Herring, the bees are for more than just honey – he's aiming to increase his sustainability beyond the field by supporting pollinator populations.

"To make our farm the most sustainable it can be, we diversify, we adapt to any problems and try to correct them," said Herring. "The biggest thing is leaving a legacy for future generations."

A BASF rep noticed Herring's interest in pollinator populations and introduced him to the Monarch Challenge, led by BASF's sustainability initiative, Living Acres. Launched last year, the Monarch Challenge encourages growers and farm families to plant milkweed in non-crop areas of their land to aid monarch butterflies in their migration. Milkweed is an important part of the monarch's life cycle, as it is the only plant monarchs will lay their eggs on, and the leaves of the milkweed are a main food source for the monarch larvae.

"Right now, we've got the milkweed out of the way in a grassy area," said Herring. "It's out of the spray areas and away from the field and will be protected from any kind of chemical inputs that would go into the farm. It's in a fertile area surrounded by grasses and other native plants."

Successfully establishing milkweed

Milkweed is easy to maintain – but can be tough to establish in the first year.

A few ways to help with milkweed establishment would be to lightly till the area, spray an herbicide before planting, and dig a bigger hole to make sure there isn't any competition to the seedling. It's also important to keep the weed watered throughout the first year, especially if it's in a dry climate.

"It makes sense to spray a little post-emergent to combat the grasses," said Herring. "You don't really think about it, but grasses are very detrimental. They can get in there and take a plant down in a hurry."

It seems silly to baby a weed, but it may also seem silly to ask growers to plant them in the first place. However, Herring thinks it's worth it.

"I think the milkweed is manageable," said Herring. "It's easy to combat and keep trained. We noticed a few butterflies later in the season, which makes me think we're doing something right."

Growers are uniquely positioned to help positively impact the monarch population by planting milkweed in non-crop areas on their farms. To get notifications on the Monarch Challenge, growers can sign up for the monthly newsletter at www.monarchchallenge.com.

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You can also see a video of Andy Herring's Monarch Challenge experience, [here](#).

About BASF's Crop Protection division

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