

Monarch Collaborative Frequently Asked Questions

- **What’s all the buzz about monarch butterflies?**
The monarch butterfly population that migrates from the United States and Canada to Mexico has declined by as much as ~90 percent in recent decades.
- **Why do people care about the monarchs?**
Monarch butterflies are an iconic species beloved by many, and their amazing two-way annual migration is a remarkable natural phenomenon unique among insects.
- **What are challenges faced by monarchs?**
Monarch butterflies are a resilient species, giving hope for population recovery, but a loss of habitat including milkweed and nectar resources is limiting their recovery. In addition, monarchs face threats from weather and climate, predators, pathogens and parasites, and declining winter habitat in Mexico that collectively contribute to the overall population decline. Access to quality habitat including milkweed, a wildflower that sustains the species throughout its development and migration, is required to support population growth.
- **What role can farmers and ranchers play in helping monarchs?**
As traditional stewards of the land, farmers and ranchers have a unique and important role to play given their experience in implementing voluntary conservation practices in concert with crop production and livestock operations. Farms and ranches are locations of large acreages — underutilized, less productive or non-production portions of land may present opportunities to increase habitat available to monarchs and other pollinators.
- **What is considered to be a “healthy” or “sustainable” population of monarch butterflies?**
A healthy population is one that is large enough and has sufficient habitat to rebound in response to variable stressors. The [National Strategy to Promote the Health of Honey Bees and Other Pollinators](#) has set a short-term target of 225 million monarchs occupying approximately six hectares (~15 acres) in Mexico by 2020.
- **What about the Endangered Species Act? Is it true the monarch is being considered for listing under the ESA?**
The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) was petitioned to list monarchs as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. They will conduct a status review to determine if the species warrants listing. It is not currently listed.

- **If I take conservation actions and the monarch is listed, will I have increased regulation of my land?**
The best way to avoid potential future regulation associated with the ESA is to work to ensure there are healthy monarch populations now and in the future. To promote conservation, the USFWS and USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service are working together to address producer uncertainties so that producers will know they can continue to implement conservation practices benefiting monarchs as part of their agricultural operation even if the monarch is listed.
- **What can farmers and ranchers do now to help monarchs?**
One of the most significant things to do to benefit monarchs on the agricultural landscape is to leave existing milkweed that does not compete with production in place. Additional steps include accessing resources and partners for guidance, implementing actions that are appropriate for your operation, and sharing your experience with others. The Monarch Collaborative is working to support voluntary conservation and habitat restoration efforts across the U.S. migratory range and drawing upon the success of other species as a guide (e.g., Artic grayling, sage grouse, Amargosa toad, and New England cottontail).
- **Why is milkweed important?**
Monarch caterpillars can only eat milkweed and monarch adults only lay their eggs on milkweed. Without milkweed, there would be no monarchs.
- **Is milkweed all monarchs need?**
No. Adult monarch butterflies feed on nectar from many different flowering plants from spring through fall, but visit milkweeds to lay their eggs during the breeding season.
- **Is common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) the only species they need?**
No. Monarchs can use many different milkweed species, depending on location in North America.
- **After years of control efforts are you telling us we should plant milkweed?**
Planting, maintaining, or promoting milkweed growth — a wildflower that monarch butterflies cannot live without — is the most important step farmers and ranchers can take to support monarchs and other pollinators. Reintroducing this wildflower in a manner that minimizes impacts on row crops and livestock production will help support the reemergence of a robust and sustainable monarch butterfly population.

- **Isn't milkweed a noxious weed?**
Milkweeds are not listed as noxious weeds on any state noxious weeds list, but may still be considered for eradication on some county lists. Check with your county or appropriate agency for guidance.
- **Where is the money and technical assistance coming from to establish and maintain monarch habitat?**
Many farmers and ranchers are already engaged in conservation initiatives focused on water quality, erosion control, habitat and other ecological priorities funded by a variety of public and private programs that can also support monarch habitat. Financial and technical assistance directly targeting restoration and enhancement of monarch habitat is available from a variety of sources, such as USDA's [Natural Resources Conservation Service Monarch Habitat Development Project](#), the Farm Service Agency [Conservation Reserve Program](#) and other USDA Farm Bill conservation programs, and the USFWS [Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program](#).
- **I'm happy to help, but doesn't this need to happen on a larger scale to make a difference?**
Everybody has a part to play: urban or suburban homeowners, rights-of-ways, etc. Only with everyone working together can we achieve a sustainable monarch butterfly population. Every bit makes a difference.
- **Is there sufficient habitat for monarchs to overwinter in Mexico?**
Mexico's oyamel fir forests play a unique role in supporting monarch butterflies and their migration. Conservation and stewardship of the overwintering habitat is equally important. For more than a decade, conservation groups and government agencies have made significant progress in protecting monarchs' overwintering areas in Mexico.
- **Sure, we can put milkweed in our yard, but are you asking me to put milkweed in my row crops?**
No. The conservation practices being developed are intended for use on lands that are not in crop production. Suitable habitat sites could be non-crop areas in agricultural landscapes, including field borders, conservation strips, riparian buffers, roadsides, Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) land, marginal land, wetlands, easements, and utility rights-of-way.
- **What about milkweed on grazing lands?**
Conservation practices designed to promote healthy, sustainable grazing lands can also provide milkweed for monarchs at densities that will not pose a risk to livestock. Please contact your county or appropriate agency for guidance on maximum densities allowable on grazing lands.