

Feature Story



How cities and rural America are helping monarch butterflies

When the monarchs began their spring migration in mid-March, they started a 3,000-mile, multi-generational journey that spans most of North America. The resilient insects fly between 50 and 100 miles a day in search of milkweed to lay their eggs and rest their weary wings. During their migration, monarchs pass through many U.S. cities, which has led to the creation of a program that encourages mayors to promise to make their city more monarch friendly.

The National Wildlife Federation launched the Mayor's Monarch Pledge to help save the monarch butterfly. By taking this pledge, mayors promise to take steps to make their city more monarch friendly. According to the National Wildlife Federation's blog, more than 150 mayors have promised to take steps to protect the monarchs. Together, these mayors have taken 1,000 actions to create monarch habitats and educate citizens on how they can help by planting milkweed.

While these cities are making an impact, it is important that rural areas also offer monarch habitats rich in milkweed while they migrate. Since rural lands make up nearly 97 percent of available land in the United States, farmers have the opportunity to make the biggest positive impact on the restoration of monarch butterfly populations.

"Milkweed is the most important plant for the monarch butterfly," said Laura Vance, Biology Project Lead, BASF. "It is the only plant they lay eggs on and the sole food source for monarch caterpillars."

With this knowledge, BASF launched Living Acres, a research initiative dedicated to finding best practices for establishing milkweed refuges in non-cropland areas. As stewards of the land and experts in cultivating crops, farmers are uniquely positioned to help increase milkweed habitats for monarch butterflies, especially in rural areas. Living Acres provides the resources and support farmers need to help the monarch population grow and thrive.

Recently, CHS Inc., an agricultural cooperative, officially joined the Living Acres #MonarchChallenge during a news conference at CHS headquarters in Minnesota. The cooperative has extensive facilities along Interstate 35, which has been named the "monarch corridor," as it is a popular path monarchs take on their annual migration. According to Gary Halvorson, vice president, retail agronomy, CHS Inc. is working to plant butterfly friendly areas at its 550-plus co-op-owned facilities. Employees at CHS headquarters initiated the challenge by planting milkweed during the media event.

"Milkweed is the best way to support monarchs," said Vance. "By creating milkweed plots in rural areas, we're helping increase the likelihood that monarchs will be able to successfully complete their intense migration."

To learn more about Living Acres, and how rural areas can support milkweed plots, visit www.MonarchChallenge.com.

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