



RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE

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RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE RECEIVES FEDERAL GRANT TO IMPROVE HONEYBEE POPULATION, PROTECT STATE SPECIALTY CROPS

PROVIDENCE, R.I. – Assistant Professor of Biology Richard Stilwell will use a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) grant to develop strategies to stop the disappearance of honeybees in Rhode Island, a critical concern for the state’s specialty crops.

The \$22,736 USDA Specialty Crop Block grant funds Stilwell’s ‘Honeybee Study,’ an effort to mitigate the effects of small-hive beetle infestations on the state’s honeybee population.

These infestations are a contributing factor to an alarming decline in honeybees; the U.S. honeybee population has dropped 31 percent in the last 20 years, according to a 2006 Congressional report.

“As major crop pollinators, honeybees are critical to maintaining and enhancing the specialty crops grown in Rhode Island,” Stilwell said. “We will paint a detailed picture of the factors negatively impacting our honeybees.”

By collecting a honeybee population census and concurrently tracking small-hive beetle infestations, Stilwell will create a baseline for multi-year population tracking and cultivate tactics to reduce the small-hive beetle impact.

“This study will benefit Rhode Island for years to come, by gathering information we can use to proactively protect bee populations going forward,” Stilwell said.

The study also will provide educational outreach centered at RIC’s new, outdoor Bee Education Center, a hub for environmental and sustainability programming. Outreach initiatives will include increasing awareness of the bee’s crucial role in crop pollination and promotion of home beekeeping as a

tool to support the state's agricultural economy. A single beehive can produce up to 100 lbs. of honey per year and pollinate a three-to-four mile radius of flowers and crops.

RIC has housed an apiary (beehive) since 2011, providing a beekeeping training and biodiversity education site for adults and children. The apiary is part of RIC's Urban and Community Farming Initiative, which includes a campus garden and farmers market.

The USDA Specialty Crop Block grants are awarded to projects that will enhance specialty crops defined as fruits and vegetables, dried fruit, tree nuts and nursery crops. Stilwell's grant was disbursed through the RI Department of Environmental Management.