



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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## Bees: Keeping NY's Agriculture Industry "Buzzing"

PATTY RITCHIE July 28, 2017



Bees, both wild and managed, play a key role in our state's agriculture industry, helping crops of all kinds thrive. However, these powerful pollinators are under attack by parasitic mites.

The varroa mite—a tiny parasite that attacks honey bees— has infected 90 percent of the bee colonies surveyed this year. As a result, agriculture could see up to \$500 million in potential losses. The top crops that are dependent on healthy and abundant pollinators are apples, pumpkins and tomatoes.

In addition, managed bee colonies in upstate New York have lost up to 70 percent of their bees over the last few years because of disease, pesticides and loss of habitat, according to a recent state study. Once the mites take hold, potentially deadly viruses spread throughout the colony, which could wipe the colony out.

Experts say that it's becoming increasingly difficult to keep this mite from spreading. The varroa mite thrives off weakened bee colonies and when one colony dies, nearby hives will take honey from the weakened bees, which causes the mites to spread at a rapid rate.

The destruction of bee colonies is starting to reach alarming levels. In an effort to combat this problem, I'm pleased to have been able to secure \$290,000 over the past two years in state funding for various programs at Cornell University, aimed at conducting vital research and disease testing to protect our state's bee population.

As Chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee, I will continue to work to support programs and spearhead initiatives designed to preserve our state's pollinators and help keep this key sector of the state's economy "buzzing" for years to come.