



PHOTOGRAPHY BY: PRAIRIE RESTORATIONS INC

Connexus Energy's SolarWise garden in Ramsey, Minnesota.

A solar array is a group of solar panels and it's not the prettiest thing, largely because the areas where solar arrays are placed are usually covered in gravel or cheap turf grass, materials that won't take energy away from the solar panels. But the SolarWise garden in Ramsey, Minnesota is a whole different thing. **Connexus Energy** has a solar array there but the garden, planted with a biodiverse mix of low-growing and shade-tolerant flowers and grasses, is also home to bee hives. It's the first solar array in the U.S. that houses a bee apiary, as a collection of hives is known, but hopefully the first of many.

(SEE: [Martha's Bee Hives](#))



PHOTOGRAPHY BY: BOLTON BEES

Travis and Chiara Bolton of Bolton Bees.

The bees at the Solarwise Garden belong to Chiara and Travis Bolton of [Bolton Bees](#). Their first-generation business breeds Minnesota-hardy queen bees and produces a line of distinct, location-specific honey. Rob Davis of [Fresh Energy](#), a non-profit that advocates for pollinator-friendly plants around and under solar arrays introduced the Boltons to Connexus Energy after hearing about the SolarWise garden.

Davis explains that 90 percent of Minnesota and Wisconsin's solar arrays are pollinator friendly, yet Connexus Energy's SolarWise garden is the first one to house a bee apiary. He's working to get more bees housed at solar arrays and the Boltons are totally on board with that, Chiara Bolton explains "this model can be replicated throughout the nation. It promotes three positive attributes: solar energy, habitat for all pollinators, and bees."



PHOTOGRAPHY BY: PRAIRIE RESTORATIONS INC

Travis Bolton assessing hives at the solar array.

At a time when bees are under threat from colony collapse disorder, and we now know that the loss of bees could result in a loss of **1/3 of our food supply**, it's important to help protect these vital pollinators. Chiara says that creating pollinator-friendly habitat is one of the most significant actions to support them: "The bees will collect pollen and nectar from resources within a three-mile radius of the hives to use as food. The more healthy options that bees have, the more productive and healthier they will be."

(READ: [Bees Are Now Protected on the Endangered Species List](#))

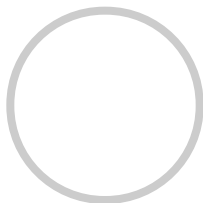


PHOTOGRAPHY BY: MATTHEW GORRIE

Solar Honey and other honey from Bolton's Bees

And something really sweet is coming out of the pairing of bees and solar arrays -- honey! The Boltons have started to produce Solar Honey from their hives at the SolarWise Garden. They're hoping to expand to more solar arrays with bee-friendly plantings, and they and Rob Davis are hoping to expand this bee-solar partnership across the country. Here's to [more perfect habitats for bees](#).

Watch Martha place bee hives on her property:



ABOUT THE AUTHOR
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Ryan is a Canadian-born writer based in New York City. When she's not writing, you can find her devouring a good book or planning her next adventure. As a self-proclaimed foodie and an avid lover of musicals and contemporary art, she finds that New York truly is "the greatest city in the world."

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