

Innovation opens new paths for pollinator protection at the 2025 European Bee Award

Innovation met tradition at the European Parliament in Brussels this December as the European Bee Award celebrated its twelfth edition, spotlighting practical solutions to one of Europe's most pressing environmental challenges: the decline of pollinators. Hosted by MEP Paulo DO NASCIMENTO CABRAL, the ceremony brought together policymakers, farmers, beekeepers, scientists, and industry representatives to recognize projects that bridge agriculture, biodiversity, and technological ingenuity.

Jointly organised by ELO and John Deere, the European Bee Award has, since 2014, honoured initiatives that deliver tangible benefits for bees and other pollinators. This year's focus was on innovative technological solutions, reflecting a growing understanding that modern farming tools and ecological protection can evolve together rather than stand in opposition.

The 2025 top prize went to EcoCut, a German project developed by Fischer MASCHINENBAU. EcoCut addresses a long overlooked yet significant threat to insects: mowing operations. Its solution is deceptively simple. An air blowing system mounted ahead of mowing equipment gently moves bees and other insects away from danger before blades pass through. Field tests, including a dedicated experiment using bee combs, showed that the system can protect up to 90 percent of bees present during mowing.



European Bee Award winners (EcoCut) together with jury representatives. From left to the right: MEP Paulo do Nascimento Cabral (EPP), Prof. Dr. Reiner Beutel (EcoCut), Matthias Reber (EcoCut), Gilles Dryancour (John Deere, Member of the Jury), Dieter Reber (EcoCut), Thierry de l'Escaille (ELO, Member of the Jury), Prof. Dr. Michael Garratt (University of Reading, President of the Jury).



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For the EcoCut team, the award validates a philosophy rooted in practicality. The system requires no reduction in working speed and does not place additional burdens on farmers or contractors. Instead, it demonstrates how small design changes can yield substantial ecological gains. As Dieter REBER of EcoCut explained during the ceremony, the project was driven by the belief that efficiency and nature friendly practices do not need to be mutually exclusive.

Alongside the main winner, the jury awarded a special mention to Apiluz, a French initiative based in the Champagne Ardenne region. Apiluz brings together farmers, beekeepers, cooperatives, and the Symbiose association to tackle the summer nectar gap, a period when flowering resources for pollinators become scarce. The project encourages farmers to leave three metre wide unmown strips in alfalfa fields from June to August, allowing plants to flower and provide vital forage.

Since its launch in 2021, Apiluz has mobilised more than 2,400 farmers across seven departments, creating over 1,850 kilometres of flowering strips. Annual monitoring shows these areas host significantly higher numbers of pollinators and beneficial insects, proving that modest adjustments in land management can transform agricultural landscapes.

Speakers at the ceremony underscored the broader significance of these initiatives. Jury President Professor Michael GARRATT praised the diversity and creativity of applications, while Thierry DE L'ESCAILLE, ELO Executive President, emphasised that the European Bee Award continues to demonstrate how simple, well designed practices can make a meaningful difference on the ground. Gilles DRYANCOUR, Vice President for Corporate Affairs at John Deere and a member of the jury, echoed this view, noting that technological progress in agriculture must empower farmers while protecting nature. Together, their messages reinforced the award's central theme: innovation and environmental responsibility are strongest when they move forward hand in hand.

