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## The Iowa Monarch Conservation Consortium

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## **Abstract**

The Iowa Monarch Conservation Consortium was established in February 2015 through the efforts of numerous Iowa farmer, livestock producer, commodity and conservation organizations; Iowa State University's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences; the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

## **Keywords**

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## **Disciplines**

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### The Iowa Monarch Conservation Consortium

By Bob Hartzler, Department of Agronomy, Sue Blodgett and Steven Bradbury, Department of Entomology, and Richard Hellmich, USDA-ARS.

The Iowa Monarch Conservation Consortium was established in February 2015 through the efforts of numerous Iowa farmer, livestock producer, commodity and conservation organizations; Iowa State University's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences; the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

The Consortium, convened by the College, grew out of discussions that started in the spring of 2014. It establishes a farmer-led, science-based approach to enhancing monarch butterfly reproduction in Iowa through collaborative and coordinated efforts of farmers, private citizens and their organizations. The long-term goal of the consortium is to lead efforts in the recovery of the monarch butterfly without impacting the productivity of Iowa's cropland.

There are many factors contributing to the decline of the monarch population, but one aspect is the large reduction in breeding habitat in Iowa and surrounding states. Monarchs depend on milkweed plants for caterpillar growth and development. Changes in crop management practices and a reduction in Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres have contributed to the loss of milkweed across much of the monarch breeding range.



**Photo. Monarch larvae feed exclusively on milkweeds.**

In the fall of 2014 a petition was filed with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to protect the monarch butterfly as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. While the Consortium is not taking a position on the petition, it is

focused on supporting habitat improvements in underutilized areas in rural landscapes that do not conflict with agricultural production, are sufficient in scale to support improved monarch breeding success, and strive to complement other conservation programs.

The Consortium will take a science-based approach in assisting farmers and communities in enhancing monarch butterfly reproduction. Objectives of the research component include:

1. develop cost-effective methods to establish and maintain milkweed species and companion flowering plants,
2. determine breeding habitat characteristics that influence the success of monarch reproduction, and
3. refine survey techniques to assess performance of the conservation program.

The consortium's extension and outreach program will draw upon all the member organizations to ensure the broad delivery of practical, science-based information on monarch butterfly conservation practices for Iowa's landscapes.

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