



Cotton bollworms and tobacco budworms cost Texas farmers about \$50 million a year, and that price tag would be even higher “without the aid of nature’s crop dusters” Mexican free-tailed bats,” according to Fiscal Notes.

The publication of the Texas Comptroller’s Office says it reports on “trends and topics vital to the economy of Texas” “an unusual but well-deserved venue for an article on bats. The insects cause their severe damage by, in their moth stages, laying eggs in a wide variety of crops. The larvae emerge and feed on what farmers had hoped to sell.

In addition to direct damage, says Fiscal Notes, Texas farmers spent an average of \$30 million a year from 1995 to 1997 trying to control these pests with chemicals and other techniques.

But the “first line of the defense,” the magazine said, is the approximately 100 million Mexican free-tailed bats that “congregate in the Texas Hill Country each spring.” Most of them spend the summer in 13 Texas caves, including Bat Conservation International’s Bracken Bat Cave, which holds millions of freetails “the largest community of mammals in the world.

Quoting John Westbrook of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Research Service, the publication said that a nursing mother bat eats about 70 percent of her weight in insects each night, so “the estimate is that 100 million Mexican free-tailed bats must consumer of 1,000 tons of insects per night while they are nursing their young.”

“As we learn more, we are continually impressed with how economically and ecologically important bats are,” BCI Founder Merlin Tuttle told Fiscal Notes.

Farmers are taking note. The magazine cites Carol Baxter, an apple grower in Medina, Texas, who heard a lecture by Tuttle and decided to give bats a try. She put six bat houses around her orchard and now has 350 to 500 bats eating moths that threaten her apples.

“I recommend it for anybody who has crops,” Baxter said. “They’re also wonderful to have around the house. We can sit outside without any bugs.”

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