



Scientists, Legislators Show Concern for Bee Deaths

Scientists draw plan to study bee deaths while senators consider two bills to fund research on honey bees and other pollinators vital to the nation's farms.

6/5/2008

By Tom Meade

Researchers from state agricultural departments, the federal government, and several universities have agreed on a plan for dealing with Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD), a mysterious ailment that has devastated honey bee colonies in at least 36 states.

© Tom Meade Meanwhile, legislators show concern as well. The U.S. Senate is considering two bills to fund research on honey bees and other pollinators vital to the nation's farms.

The CCD steering committee met in Washington on July 16 to announce a research strategy under Kevin Hackett, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's national program leader for bees and pollination.

Scientists participating in the project will attempt to identify the underlying cause for the new ailment that leaves hives with few or no adult honey bees but few dead bees inside hive boxes.

Main Research Areas

The researchers will concentrate on four possible causes for CCD:
New or reemerging pathogens

More Government Briefs

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USDA expands assistance grants

If you live in an area designated a level "D3 Drought--Extreme" or greater you may be able to receive emergency hay and forage.

States named in the expanded area: Alabama, Indiana, Mississippi, Montana, Ohio, Oregon and Tennessee. Find out if you qualify.

Farm Bill Update

Congressional actions expected soon!

The House is due to vote soon on the 2007 Farm Bill. Find out what happens. Here are some websites offering updates:

House Agriculture Committee

Sustainable Agriculture Coalition Farm Bill Action Center

Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC) New bee pests or parasites Environmental and/or nutritional stress Pesticides

Other Causes?

Cell-phone radiation and other possible causes for the disorder have also been mentioned, but Dennis van Engelsdorp, acting state apiarist with the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture and a member of the Steering Committee, said initial studies of dying colonies revealed a large number of disease organisms present, with no single cause.

Other entomologists suspect that there may be several culprits – including protozoa, a class of insecticides known as neonicotinoids, and poor nutrition – combining to kill the bees. Beekeepers first noticed the malady going into last winter.



Importance of Bees, Funding Recognized

"This action plan provides a coordinated framework to ensure that all of the research that needs to be done is covered in order to get to the bottom of the CCD problem," said Gale Buchanan, USDA under secretary for research, education and economics.

"There were enough honey bees to provide pollination for U.S. agriculture this year, but beekeepers could face a serious problem next year and beyond."

In Congress, Senators John Thune (R-S.D.), Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) and Bob Casey (D-Pa.) have introduced a measure authorizing \$89 million in federal funding over five years for research and grant programs at the USDA to maintain and protect honey bees and native pollinators.

Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) has also introduced legislation in the Farm, Nutrition, and Community Investment Act to allocate \$250 million over 10 years to the USDA to study the CCD phenomenon and find ways to restore bee colonies to healthy levels.

It is estimated that honey bees pollinate more than 130 crops in the United States and add \$15 billion in crop value annually.

"California's almond crop alone is worth \$2 billion per year and requires nearly one half all the honey bees in the country," Sen. Boxer said. "The future of that crop and other important crops such as avocados, apples, berries and soybeans is in jeopardy if there aren't enough bees to pollinate them for harvest." About the Author
Tom Meade is a writer, beekeeper and vegetable gardener in Rhode Island.