



Pollinator Awareness Policy Development 2014

Issue:

Over the past decade, beekeepers have reported significant losses within their hives due to Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD). Colony Collapse Disorder is the significant or total absence of adult bees in a hive. With about 2.5 million hives being managed in the U.S., CCD is a major threat to the beekeeping industry economically. Additionally, a wide variety of crops like almonds and other tree nuts, berries, fruits and vegetables rely on pollination from honey bees.

Insecticides are being targeted as a cause of CCD. On the federal level, there is potential movement to place very restrictive label requirements on certain insecticides to address CCD and other pollinator problems. The cause of CCD has yet to be determined. Research shows the problem is a combination of factors. Varroa mites are arguably the greatest threat to the U.S. bee population. Despite this and other potential causes of CCD, some still place blame on exposure to the pesticide class, neonicotinoids (neonics). They claim bees are exposed to neonics by seed treatment dust and over-the-top spray applications. There is no conclusive scientific data to implicate neonics as the cause of CCD. However, if the federal government places label restrictions on the use of neonics for the protection of bees, it will severely limit the effectiveness of this product for pest control.

States are working to proactively find a balance between pollinators and pesticide use. The strategy is to prove to federal regulators that a voluntary, best management practice approach will prove label requirements are not necessary. The foundation of this strategy is better communication between farmers and beekeepers. Tennessee farmers may need to explore efforts for row crop producers and beekeepers to better coexist cooperatively.

Questions:

How aggressively should TFBF work to be proactive in attempts to hedge potential regulations on chemicals as a result of CCD?

If any, what types of systems/programs will work best for Tennessee?

Are the implications of potential new regulations great enough to affect farming operations?

Background:

Some states are working to find a balance between pollinators and pesticide use. While it is uncertain, and considered by some to be unlikely that neonics cause CCD, exposure to the pesticide is included among a number of stressors that may be considered to negatively impact bees. There could be a need for Tennessee to explore efforts for row crop producers and beekeepers to better coexist cooperatively. Programs in other states have adopted these approaches when developing statewide programs:

- Know Your Farmer, Know Your Beekeeper: An information exchange between farmers and beekeepers to maintain open dialogue between the two parties.
- "Bee Aware" Flag: A flagging system to clearly identify hive locations near agricultural fields.
- Organizational Outreach: Cooperation between agricultural organizations to educate interested parties about the issue, and how to mitigate potential problems.
- Establishment of grower/beekeeper best management practices.

Farm Bureau Policy:

Honeybees & Beekeeping (Partial)

Honeybees pollinate most grain and fruit crops. The presence of Varroa and Tracheal mites in the United States represents a serious threat to honeybees. The Tennessee Department of Agriculture, the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture, and the United States Department of Agriculture must monitor the movement and control and eradicate the Varroa and Tracheal mite. More aggressive action is necessary. All interested parties must protect the interest of all Tennessee farmers.

It's critical that we provide research grant money to immediately address honeybee colony health. Research funding is needed to determine the cause and treatment of the syndrome. Honey producers not only harvest pure honey for human consumption, they provide an invaluable service to help sustain many agricultural crops that rely on pollination.