

Statement of the
American Honey Producers Association, Inc.
for the
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, D.C.

April 24, 2007

"If the bee disappeared off the surface of the globe
then man would only have four years of life left.
No more bees, no more pollination, no more plants,
no more animals, no more man."

Attributed to Albert Einstein

Chairman Harkin and Members of the Committee, my name is Mark Brady. I am from Waxahachie, Texas. I have been a commercial beekeeper for over 30 years. I am President of the American Honey Producers Association ("AHPA"). The AHPA is a national organization of beekeepers actively engaged in most commercial honey production and agricultural pollination throughout the country.

We appreciate this opportunity to testify before the Committee on the state of America's beekeeping and honey industry. We look forward to working with the Committee - in the context of the Farm Bill and otherwise - to help assure that our beekeeping sector can remain strong and that we can have healthy bees for honey production and vital pollination services. To assist Congress in this process, we offer a number of suggestions for addressing the many difficult problems faced by modern beekeepers and those who rely on honey bees for critical pollination services.

As the Committee is well aware, Colony Collapse Disorder ("CCD") has recently emerged as a new and serious threat to America's beekeepers and their honey bees. CCD is a highly destructive and still mysterious condition. Despite the tremendous work being done by government, academic and private sector researchers, there is much we still do not know about CCD and its causes. However, based on reports from beekeepers throughout the country, it is becoming increasingly apparent that CCD poses a serious and, perhaps, unprecedented threat to America's honey bee colonies. For beekeepers, bee losses are a harsh fact of life. Beekeepers often face serious bee losses from a variety of causes. However, the losses apparently related to CCD are much more widespread and severe, with some beekeepers reporting the disappearance or destruction of 90 percent of their honey bees.

Given the importance of commercial bee pollination to wide segments of U.S. agriculture, it is imperative that beekeepers, producers, researchers and the government continue to work together on an urgent basis to develop measures to combat CCD. In this regard, the AHPA

very much appreciates the letter that Senator Baucus and 43 other Senators - including 17 members of this Committee - recently sent to Secretary Johanns seeking prompt action on CCD research.

Although CCD is a potentially grave problem, it is not the only problem facing our industry. We also face many other difficult challenges. These include, to name a few, treatment-resistant mites and pests, rapidly increasing demands for pollination, rising production costs, a history of price fluctuations that have eroded profits, environmental concerns, and unfairly traded imports. Together with CCD, these other serious issues should be a wake-up call to all of us about the critical importance of longer-term and sustained programs, strategies and solutions, as well as new ideas, to assure the continued health of both our honey bees and our vital beekeeping sector.

I. The State of the U.S. Honey Industry

A. Honey Bee Population

In the past few decades, U.S. commercial beekeepers have seen a worrisome and dramatic decline in the population of U.S. honey bees. According to a report released last year by the National Research Council, the population of American honey bees has plunged by 30 percent in the last 20 years. This staggering loss of managed honey bee colonies is one of the most severe declines U.S. agriculture has ever experienced in such a short period (and does not even reflect the latest impact from CCD). Most troubling, there are far fewer bee hives in the United States today than at any time in the last 50 years.

As the honey bee population has declined, so has the number of commercial beekeepers. Not surprisingly, commercial beekeepers supply the vast majority of the domestic honey consumed in the United States and the majority of pollination services. Today, the number of commercial beekeepers has fallen to an all-time low of 1,600. This drop in the number of commercial beekeepers corresponds with a steady decline in the number of colonies producing honey in the United States. In 2006, 2.39 million colonies produced honey, down 7 percent from 2004.

B. Honey Production and Sales

Honey bees, and consequently the U.S. honey industry, are indispensable to contemporary American agriculture. Although honey is produced in every state, North Dakota, California, Florida, South Dakota, Montana and Minnesota lead the nation in honey production. Chart 1 below lists the top six honey-producing states in 2006, and indicates the number of pounds produced and the value of production for each of these states.

Chart 1
U.S. Honey Production -- Top 6 States
(deleted table)

Source: USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service

In the recent past, honey bees have produced an average of 200 million pounds of honey annually in the United States. In 2005, however, less than 175 million pounds of honey were

produced in the United States, a five percent decrease from 2004. In 2006, domestic honey production fell even further, amounting to less than 155 million pounds, almost a 16 percent decrease from 2004. By comparison, as recently as 2000, U.S. commercial beekeepers produced over 220 million pounds of honey.

U.S. sales of domestic honey also reached historically low levels in the past two years. Based on the National Honey Board's data, U.S.-produced honey accounted for only 38 percent of all U.S. honey sales in 2005, and fell to a startling 31 percent in 2006. This represents a sharp decline from 2004, when 46 percent of U.S. sales were of domestic honey. Meanwhile, honey imports have dramatically risen, accounting for 62 percent of U.S. sales in 2005 and 69 percent in 2006. Chart 2 below shows the recent decrease in the share of U.S. honey sales and the increase in the level of foreign honey being imported into the U.S. marketplace.

Chart 2

Share of U.S. Honey Sales

(deleted table)

Source: National Honey Board Assessments

C. Unfairly Traded Imports and Honey Prices

The substantial increases in sales of imported honey in the United States over the past two years is a reflection of the significant pressure that U.S. honey producers have continued to face from below-cost, unfairly traded imports, particularly from China.

In 2002, domestic honey producers obtained antidumping protection from unfair imports. As a result, U.S. honey prices recovered from 70 cents per pound in 2001 to \$1.33 per pound in 2002 and \$1.39 per pound in 2003. However, beginning in 2004, importers of honey from "new shippers" in China began to employ a loophole under U.S. trade law that permitted their deposits of estimated antidumping duties to be secured by bonds, rather than cash, as is required in other circumstances. Importers related to Chinese producers imported massive amounts of below-cost honey under such bonds. Once final duties were determined, these unscrupulous parties would disappear before U.S. Customs and Border Protection could collect the required duties.

As a result of such abuses, U.S. honey prices fell to \$1.07 per pound in 2004 and 92 cents per pound in 2005. In August 2006 - with the strong support of many members of this Committee - Congress closed this bonding loophole through a provision of the Pension Protection Act of 2006. Since this important action by Congress, U.S. honey prices have recovered somewhat,

increasing to \$1.04 per pound in 2006. While these prices are improved, they are still significantly below 2003 prices. However, as shown on Chart 3 below, recent prices are significantly above prices in 2001, during the period before antidumping protection was imposed by the United States.

Chart 3
U.S. Honey Prices

(table deleted)

Source: USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service

Increased imports, decreased sales and low honey prices caused U.S. honey producers to face unprecedented difficulty in selling honey during 2004, 2005 and portions of 2006. This difficulty in making sales placed significant economic and financial strain on the U.S. honey sector, and caused many long-time honey producers to consider exiting the honey and beekeeping business altogether. Although Congress has eliminated the loophole that permitted massive abuses of U.S. trade law, U.S. honey producers still face unfairly traded imports and new attempts to circumvent U.S. law. These include imports of honey that are deliberately declared and labeled as other products, imports of tainted honey and the transshipment of honey through third countries to avoid duties.

D. Beeswax

Commercial beekeepers also market and sell the beeswax produced by honey bees. Beeswax is used commercially to make fine candles, cosmetics, and pharmaceuticals. Cosmetics and pharmaceuticals account for 60 percent of the total consumption of beeswax.

E. Pollination

In addition to providing the marketplace with U.S. honey, commercial beekeepers also supply U.S. honey bees for the pollination of a variety of agricultural crops. These pollination services contribute billions of dollars annually to the U.S. farm economy. Without honey bee pollination, many plants cannot produce fruit after they bloom. If pollination levels are not sufficient, the fruit produced is likely to be deformed or smaller than its normal size.

Honey bees pollinate more than 90 food, fiber, and seed crops. In particular, the fruits, vegetables and nuts that are cornerstones of a balanced and healthy diet are especially dependent on continued access to honey bee pollination. Honey bee pollination is vital for the production of such diverse crops as almonds, apples, oranges, melons, broccoli, tangerines, cranberries, strawberries, vegetables, alfalfa, soybeans, sunflower, and cotton, among others. In fact, honey bees pollinate about one-third of the food in the human diet. USDA has estimated that improved crop yields and crop quality attributable to honey bee pollination alone are valued at some \$20 billion annually.

The importance of this pollination to contemporary agriculture cannot be understated - the value of pollinated crops is vastly greater than the total value of honey and wax produced by honey

bees. The scale of commercial pollination is also vast. Each year more than 140 billion honey bees representing 2 million colonies are employed by U.S. beekeepers across and around the country to pollinate a wide range of important crops.

The critical role of honey bees --and of the U.S. honey producers who supply honey bees for pollination--is illustrated by the pollination of California's almond crop, which is that state's largest agricultural export. California grows 100 percent of the nation's almond crop and supplies 80 percent of the world's almonds. Each year, honey bees are transported from all over the nation to pollinate California almonds, which is the largest single crop requiring honey bees for pollination. Currently, more than one million honey bee hives are needed to pollinate the 600,000 acres of almond groves that line California's Central Valley. That means nearly half of all the managed honey-producing colonies in the U.S. are involved in pollinating almonds in California during February and early March. As with other agricultural products, having enough bees to pollinate the almond crop can mean the difference between a good crop and disaster. As OnEarth magazine noted recently, the fate and continued success of California's almond crop rests "on the slender back of the embattled honey bee."

Many other U.S. agriculture producers rely on extensive honey bee pollination. A Maine blueberry grower recently put it quite succinctly--"without bees in May, there are no blueberries in August." Additionally, avocados -- a \$363 million crop in California -- receive more than 90 percent of their pollination from the honey bee. Studies on the effect of pollination of cotton by honey bees show an increase of 17 to 19 percent in the yield of seed cotton, as compared to a cotton crop that is not pollinated by honey bees. The cattle and farm-raised catfish industries also benefit from honey bee pollination, as pollination is important for growing alfalfa, which is fodder for cattle and farm-raised fish. In short, the bee pollination is vital to important crops nationwide.

The ability of U.S. beekeepers to provide these essential pollination services at reasonable cost depends directly on their ability to produce honey and beeswax and sell these important products at fair prices. Although the United States can import honey, it will never be able to import bees on the massive scale required by U.S. farm producers for critical pollination services. Without strong sales and good prices for honey, many beekeepers will simply be unable to continue in business. This, in turn, will reduce the supply and increase the price of honey bee pollination. Additionally, the production of honey is necessary to assure the good health of bees that pollinate other crops, such as almonds, that are not good sources of honey.

II. Trends and Threats in the Honey and Beekeeping Sector

In addition to the perils posed by CCD, the most recent threat to our industry, it is also important for Congress to recognize other continuing trends and threats facing the U.S. beekeeping sector.

A. Fewer Colonies, Increasing Pollination Demands

As noted above, the number of U.S. bee colonies has plunged in recent decades. Under current conditions, it is anticipated that the number of bee colonies will, at best, remain stagnant. At the same time, the demand for commercial pollination services has been increasing exponentially.

For example, in the early 1990s, only a relatively limited number of out-of-state beekeepers traveled to California to pollinate the almond crop. Today, well over 1 million of the nation's 2 million commercial bee colonies are used for almond pollination. The California Almond Board estimates that, by 2012, substantial increases in almond acreage will require over 2 million hives for pollination - an amount equivalent to the number of all current commercial bee colonies. In short, fewer and fewer bees are available to pollinate ever increasing crop volumes.

B. Difficult-to-Control Pests and Diseases

Since 1984, the health of U.S. bee colonies has also been under continued attack from mites and pests for which appropriate controls must constantly be developed. For example, the pinhead-sized Varroa "Vampire" mite is systematically destroying bee colonies and, in recent years, has been considered the most serious threat to honey bees. In addition, tracheal mites destroy bee colonies by clogging the bees' breathing tubes, blocking the flow of oxygen and eventually killing the infested bees. Additional losses are caused by a honey bee bacterial disease and a honey bee fungal disease. These pests and diseases, especially Varroa mites and the bacterium causing American foulbrood, are now resistant to chemical controls in many regions of the country. Further, pests are building resistance to newly-developed chemicals more quickly than in the past, thereby limiting the longevity of new chemical controls.

In 2006, losses caused by these pests and mites and other recent problems required U.S. beekeepers to import some honey bees from other countries (namely, New Zealand and Australia) for pollination services. This marked the first time since 1922 that honey bees were imported into the U.S. for pollination, underscoring the fragile state of the U.S. honey industry.

C. Environmental Challenges

Beekeepers must also operate in an increasingly complex ecological and agricultural environment. The improper use of agricultural pesticides has long been responsible for bee kills nationwide. These bee kills have been increasing in frequency and damage in recent years. Beekeepers also worry about the effects on bees of new genetically modified crops and new and more complex agricultural chemicals, which must be studied thoroughly to make sure that they do not pose the risk of further compounding existing man-made threats to bee colonies.

D. Increased Demands on Beekeepers

These developments and trends are placing increasing demands on commercial bee colonies and the beekeepers who manage them. Many commercial bee colonies are in almost constant motion, crisscrossing the country to pollinate a vast array of crops. While this mobility is a boon to agricultural producers who need pollination, it places increased stresses on the bees and exposes them to additional threats and increasingly subjects beekeepers to the vagaries of such factors as energy costs and crop cycles. Additionally, commercial bee colonies must be managed much more intensively than in the past, requiring greater effort and vigilance throughout the year in the monitoring, treatment and feeding of bees. These efforts are time-consuming and expensive, but are absolutely essential if U.S. agriculture is to have the pollination that it increasingly requires.

III. Beekeeper Experience with CCD

A. Massive Losses Linked to CCD

Within the past year, CCD has emerged as a new, additional and potentially grave threat to America's beekeepers. CCD causes the sudden and unexplained death of bees in colonies. Most of the adult bees in a colony mysteriously disappear, and soon the colony completely collapses. As shown in Attachment 1, bee losses linked to CCD have been reported in 27 states.

The AHPA has been receiving many reports of collapsing colonies and staggering bee losses from beekeepers throughout the country. There does not appear to be a discernible pattern to these losses. Loss reports have come to us from both large-scale and smaller beekeepers, and from beekeepers who transport their colonies extensively as well as those who keep their colonies at one location. One beekeeper may experience pervasive colony collapse, while neighboring beekeepers report no such losses. Additionally, CCD-related losses have been experienced by beekeepers with colonies under stress from pests and other factors, as well as by those who have strong colonies and vigilantly employ state-of-the-art management practices, including syrup and protein feeding and mite controls.

The experiences of a number of individual beekeepers demonstrate the extent to which CCD is devastating beekeeping operations and poses a threat to the U.S. beekeeping sector as a whole. These are a few of many examples:

? A highly respected beekeeping operation in Ohio that usually provides excellent bees to larger operations for pollination has reported that all but 100 of its 800 colonies have been destroyed, and that the remaining colonies were not strong enough for pollination in California.

? A shipment of 1900 bee colonies from South Dakota was inspected in California on February 1st and found to be very strong. A mere two weeks later, almost one-quarter of these bees were below pollination strength.

? The Mississippi State apiarist reports that one migratory beekeeper based in Mississippi has only 220 of 1200 colonies remaining.

? A sixth-generation Colorado beekeeper reports that he has lost 2800 of his 4000 colonies.

? A Kansas beekeeper had only 1650 hives remaining from a June 2006 peak of 4400.

We anticipate that these distressing reports will continue, as beekeepers in the Northeastern states begin to evaluate their colonies after the Winter months.

B. Possible Causes of CCD

Modern beekeepers are highly attentive to the condition of their bees and can usually pinpoint the causes for colony losses. However, beekeepers are baffled by these latest serious bee losses. A great many theories have been offered. Some have suggested that the stress from this almost constant movement of bee colonies for pollination, combined with the additional stress of pollinating crops, such as almonds, that provide little honey to the bees, may be a contributing factor to CCD. Many others believe that continuing infestations of the highly destructive Varroa mite, combined with other pathogens and viruses carried by these mites, may be the primary cause of CCD. Still others suggest that CCD may result from an unknown

fungal pathogen. Additionally, other beekeepers suspect that new classes of pesticides, possibly in combination with increasing and serious misuse of other commonly used agricultural chemicals, may be a cause of CCD. Research has shown that some new chemicals can impair the memory and brain metabolism of bees and that the chemicals can be present in the pollen of certain crops at levels high enough to threaten bees. It has also been suggested that CCD may be related to the introduction of foreign bees for pollination for the first time in 85 years. Recent press reports note that some researchers even believe that CCD may be caused by the disruption of honey bee navigation by cell phone signals. Finally, many beekeepers believe that recent unprecedented losses are caused by some combination of these and possibly other factors.

In short, the unexplained and severe losses apparently caused by CCD represent a new and serious challenge to the American beekeeping sector. It is imperative that this threat be addressed before it begins to thin even further the already dwindling ranks of U.S. beekeepers and creates potentially serious problems for U.S. agriculture.

IV Proposals

In the context of the upcoming Farm Bill and the FY 2008 appropriations cycle, Congress will have the opportunity to take important steps to ensure the long-term health of America's honey bees and the beekeeping industry. The AHPA urges Congress to work closely with beekeepers, agricultural producers, researchers and others on an urgent basis to find the causes of CCD and to develop effective measures to address this new and serious threat. At the same time, we believe that it is critical that these sectors also work together over the long term on a broader range of issues to assure the continued health of our honey bees and our beekeeping sector. Because bee pollination adds some \$20 billion to U.S. agricultural output each year, these efforts are vital for both U.S. agriculture and U.S. consumers.

We offer a number of proposals to address these long- and short-term needs.

A. Federal Support for Additional and Sustained Research

Strong Federal support for honey bee research is absolutely critical to unravel the mysteries of CCD and to assure that there are strong and sufficient bee colonies to address the growing pollination demands of U.S. agriculture. The honey bee industry itself is too small to support the cost of the needed research, particularly given the depressed state of honey prices in recent years. Further, there are no funds, facilities, or personnel elsewhere available in the private sector for this purpose. Accordingly, the beekeeping industry is dependent on research from public sources for the scientific answers to these threats.

Since the honey bee industry is comprised of small family-owned businesses, it relies heavily on USDA's Agricultural Research Service ("ARS") for needed research and development. The four ARS Honey Bee Research Laboratories can provide, if furnished with adequate funding, the first line of defense against exotic parasite mites, Africanized bees, and brood diseases. Equally, the laboratories are prepared to respond to new pests, pathogens and other conditions as they arise, such as CCD, that pose very serious and growing threats to the viability and

productivity of honey bees and the many crops they pollinate.

To address the near-term challenges of CCD, the AHPA has requested that Congress provide, in the FY 2008 Agriculture Appropriations Bill, dedicated new funding of at least \$1 million for additional ARS research. Such funding could be allocated to the ARS laboratories at Beltsville, Maryland, and Tucson, Arizona, both of which are well situated for this additional and important work. Additionally, the Federal Government should seek ways to support the important work of bee researchers in the academic and private sectors. We recommend, for example, that funding be considered for the University of California at Davis, because it has particular expertise in honey bee research and is in close proximity to the almond groves of the California Central Valley. Such cooperative efforts could better analyze the relationship between CCD, pollination and other stress factors. A joint effort involving UC Davis would also take advantage of the fact that, in February of each year, almost the entire honey bee industry has its bees in California for pollination purposes. Additionally, innovative research on CCD by small business enterprises and U.S. Army labs might also be worthy of support.

To assure the long-term survival of a healthy honey bee sector, Congress should also authorize and assure sustained funding for honey bee research at adequate levels. As in past years, the Administration's proposed FY 2008 budget proposes to eliminate certain funding for ARS that it did not request but that the Congress has previously provided in the appropriations process. Maintaining this funding is vital to honey bee research. Consequently, the AHPA requests that, in addition to new funds for CCD research, Congress at least maintain the funding for the ARS Honey Bee Research Laboratories at Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Weslaco, Texas; Tucson, Arizona; Beltsville, Maryland; and the ARS Wild Bee Research Laboratory at Logan, Utah. We also support increased funding for critical honey bee genome research at the ARS laboratory in Baton Rouge, as proposed before by the Administration.

The importance of this ongoing research is illustrated by the sequencing of the honey bee genome at Baylor University. This research has opened the door to marker-assisted bee breeding, which offers targeted and highly effective solutions to the many problems facing modern beekeepers. Marker-assisted breeding would permit the rapid screening of potential breeders for specific DNA sequences that underlie specific desirable honey bee traits. Marker-facilitated selection offers the first real opportunity to transform the U.S. beekeeping industry from one that has been dependent upon a growing number of expensive pesticides and antibiotics into an industry that is largely free of chemical treatments. These breeding techniques would also be a powerful new weapon in the beekeeper's continuing fight against a wide array of threatening conditions and pests.

Finally, Congress should also encourage expanded research into the effects of existing and new agricultural chemicals and products on honey bees. Honey bees operate in a highly complex ecosystem. As noted above, they play a critical role in assuring strong yields for many important fruit, vegetable, seed and fiber crops. It is important to make sure that agricultural chemicals and products intended to promote crop yields through, among other things, the systemic control of plant pests, do not inadvertently have the opposite effect through adverse effects on pollinating bees.

B. The Marketing Loan Program for Honey

In the 2007 Farm Bill, it will be essential to continue the current marketing loan program for honey. This important program has helped ensure the survival of many beekeeping operations, at minimal cost to the Federal Government. Marketing loans were especially important to our industry during the last three years, when massive imports of below-priced honey prevented many U.S. producers from selling their honey at fair prices.

Congress should also consider appropriate changes to the honey marketing loan program to reflect more current pricing data and rising production costs, and to provide additional flexibility to U.S. honey producers. The AHPA requests that the Committee consider raising the loan rate from the current 60 cents per pound to 75 cents per pound. As set forth in the recently obtained Congressional Budget Office estimate in Attachment 2, a marketing loan rate of 75 cents would present very limited potential exposure to the U.S. Government. Indeed, we believe that the projected cost for a 75 cent loan rate would be less than that determined by CBO at the time of the last Farm Bill for the current 60 cent rate.

Such an increase in the loan rate would also be consistent with current pricing trends, as shown on Chart 3 above. The data that supported the current 60 cent rate included honey prices of 70 cents per pound in 2001. In the last three years, on the other hand, prices have averaged \$1.01 per pound, even during a period when abuse of the new shipper bonding loophole by importers was placing severe downward pressure on prices. This three-year average price represents a 44 percent increase in prices from 2001. The requested loan rate increase, on the other hand, would be only a 25 percent increase from the rate established in 2002.

Finally, the AHPA also requests that the Committee extend the loan term from the current nine months to twelve months, and that it consider adding a resale provision for honey loans. This would provide welcome flexibility to honey producers, particularly in addressing price changes caused by unfair imports and other factors. Congress has provided similar loan terms to other commodities and should consider doing so for honey, a crop that supports the pollination of many other crops.

C. Crop Insurance for Honey Producers

As detailed above, beekeepers throughout the country have suffered devastating losses, apparently from CCD, over the past year. Many of these are highly skilled beekeepers whose families have been beekeepers for generations. If these producers stop beekeeping operations, it is unlikely that they will be replaced. At a time of ever-growing demand for commercial pollination, U.S. agriculture can ill afford a further contraction of the beekeeping sector.

To help U.S. beekeepers survive these devastating losses, Congress may wish to consider, on a one-time basis, some form of loss payment for beekeepers whose operations have been seriously impacted by CCD and other recent conditions, including recent droughts. These payments could be limited in scope and duration and subject to clear eligibility requirements, but, if made, should be sufficient to permit beekeepers who have suffered significant losses to reestablish their beekeeping operations. Such payments would be a prudent investment by

Congress in restoring to health a sector that is vital to U.S. agricultural production.

Over the longer term, Congress must assure that honey producers can protect themselves against losses of various kinds on a shared-risk basis through a program of Federal crop insurance. Congress recognized the importance of crop insurance for honey producers when it included in the Agricultural Risk Protection Act of 2000 (P.L. 106-224) specific language regarding the development of pilot coverage to protect honey producers against destruction of bees by use of pesticides. (Section 523(a)(3)(B)). We also understand that, in 2005, the USDA's Risk Management Agency funded a contract for developing a pilot program for insuring honey producers from losses of various kinds. We further understand that USDA is reviewing various proposals for a honey crop insurance program. However, no such program has yet been submitted for approval by the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation Board.

Congress should strongly urge the USDA to establish a crop insurance program for beekeepers on an expedited basis. Such a program would provide a sustained and stable safety net for the beekeeping sector and would be a far preferable and less expensive alternative to seeking to compensate beekeepers on a crisis-by-crisis basis. USDA already provides crop insurance to over 100 crops, including many crops pollinated by bees. It makes no sense to insure these crops, while not implementing authorized coverage for the beekeepers on whom so many of these crops depend.

D. Additional Steps to Recognize The Role of Bees in the Ecosystem, the Farm Economy and Healthy Diets

Congress should also consider various steps to recognize and support the irreplaceable role that honey bees play in the larger ecosystem and in the farm economy. It has been suggested, for example, that a program of non-trade-distorting "Green Payments" might be an effective means of encouraging further environmentally beneficial practices by our beekeepers. These payments might include appropriate payments to provide greater incentives to prepare for and provide honey bee pollination.

In addition, current restrictions which prevent or complicate commercial beekeeping operations in National Parks and on other Federal lands should be eliminated or eased. These natural environments, which are physically removed from commercialized areas, are ideal environments for raising healthier honey bee colonies.

Moreover, we also urge the Committee to recognize the health and nutritional benefits of pure honey by including it as a new item in the school lunch program, along with fruits and vegetables.

E. Greater Consideration of Bees in Environmental Enforcement and Regulation

Congress must also assure that the EPA and other regulators fully recognize, in all their regulatory and enforcement activities, the paramount importance of bees to both the environment and large segments of the agricultural economy.

U.S. beekeepers support a balanced approach to the environment and environmental regulation.

We depend on chemical and antibiotic treatments to control mites and diseases that can rapidly deplete hives. We also understand that farmers similarly may need to employ pesticides and other treatments to protect crops. As concerned citizens who make our living in the outdoors, we particularly appreciate the critical importance of protecting the overall environment. In balancing these and other environmental considerations, we urge the government at all levels to give full and proper consideration to the essential role of bees in both the ecosystem and the farm economy.

Many of our members report that bee kills caused by the misuse of existing agricultural chemicals are increasing in frequency and severity. There is widespread concern that the EPA and state departments of agriculture are giving bees short shrift in their regulatory and enforcement activities. In view of the importance of bees to the environment and agriculture, Congress should seek to assure that bees are properly protected through better information and education for farmers, crop sprayers and others and, if necessary, through the strong enforcement of existing law and regulation. Similarly, potential harm to bees should be a paramount concern in the regulatory approval of new agricultural chemicals and products.

As noted above, bee pests are building resistance to new hive treatments more quickly than in the past. As a result, it is also vital for beekeepers that new treatments be developed and approved for use by the Environmental Protection Agency and other regulators at both the State and Federal levels as quickly as possible, consistent with protection of the environment and the public health. Given the central role of bee pollination in U.S. agriculture, Congress should explore whether there are avenues to hasten the approval of safe and effective new treatments that are currently under development. In particular, once the cause or causes of CCD are determined, any new treatments for that disorder should be given priority consideration.

F. Additional Technical Support for Beekeepers

As noted previously, modern beekeeping requires much more intensive management than in earlier times. Today, maintaining healthy colonies requires almost constant monitoring and close attention to feeding and treatment throughout the year. Most larger commercial beekeepers understand this new reality and are adept at these methods. However, many smaller beekeepers do not have the resources or experience needed to manage their colonies so intensively. To address this gap in information and resources, Congress should consider devoting further resources to assist smaller beekeepers in this regard. For example, it might be very helpful to some beekeepers to establish teams of expert consultants that could advise beekeepers on new management methods and help them prepare - particularly in September, October and November - for the long pollination season. Dedicated support for such outreach by the extension services of the various State universities might be one approach to providing this help.

G. Improved Honey Labeling for U.S. Consumers

Congress should also look at ways to ensure that American consumers can choose to support the domestic beekeeping sector by purchasing real U.S. honey. Current country-of origin labeling requirements for honey are subject to considerable abuse and make it difficult for consumers to know when they are purchasing American honey. Congress should consider

common-sense modifications to these origin labeling rules. Similarly, there ought to be a clear standard of identity for honey, so that consumers can know when they are buying real honey, as opposed to sugar-laden blends of "pretender" honey. A proposed standard of identity for honey has been before the Food and Drug Administration for over a year, and Congress should encourage the FDA to issue the standard.

IV. Conclusion

On behalf of the AHPA and our 750 beekeeper members nationwide, I would like to thank the Committee for your continued and committed efforts to assist the U.S. beekeeping and honey sector. We look forward to working with Congress, agricultural producers and the research community to address the serious threats posed by CCD to America's honey bee colonies. We also strongly urge the Committee and the Congress to take continuing and sustained steps over the longer term to help assure that our nation's beekeeping sector is on a strong footing.

CCD should be a loud wake-up call to all of us. Just as beekeepers must continually be vigilant against pests and other threats, all of us must continue to be on guard against threats to the vital beekeeping sector. By beginning this renewed effort now, we can prevent further serious damage of our beekeeping and honey industry, to the producers of fruits, vegetables and other important crops, and to U.S. consumers who rely on these crops for sustenance and good health.

Thank you very much for your interest in these important issues and for your consideration of our industry's views. I would be pleased to answer any questions that the members of the Committee may have.