

APRIL 21, 2017 BEEKEEPER NEWSLETTER

2017 Season The almond crop looks very good, statewide. There were enough good-weather days between storms to allow the bees to accomplish their job. The outlook for the Sacramento Valley was very poor, up to and including February 20th with virtually no bee flight to almonds due to rain and temperatures in the low 50s. The weather changed dramatically on Feb 21st with temperatures hitting 80 degrees in Chico, allowing pent-up bees to swarm the almond bloom and set a crop. There hitting were ample almond bees for rent this year due to 2 large growers deciding in October, November and December - when the water outlook was dismal -- to pull out a significant part of their acreage. Beekeepers that had set aside bees for this acreage were forced to scramble for new almond locations; most found an almond home for their bees, although some had to lower prices to do so. _

2018 Season It's hard to get a handle on the 2018 almond acreage because it's difficult to estimate the acreage being pulled out (due mainly to age - the economic life of an almond tree is about 15 years) and difficult to get an accurate count of non-bearing acreage (state figures are not always up to date). Lots of new almond plantings can be seen as one drives through the heart of almond country, many of them planted in 2015 and 2016 and many planted in February of this year. Young trees don't require bees until their 3rd year so there will be a good demand for almond bees in a couple of years, and maybe even in 2018. There were more than enough bees this year, and beekeepers that had difficulty getting an almond contract this year, may choose not to return next year. We won't really know the supply-demand situation for 2018 almond bees until January, 2018. Like every year, there will likely be a shortage of strong almond colonies in 2018 and a surplus of sub-par colonies. As we've been preaching to our growers for years (to the consternation of some beekeepers) 1.5 colonies per acre is ample, using strong colonies; even 1 strong colony/acre should do the job. If all growers rented only strong colonies at 1/acre there would never be a shortage of almond bees. We will not be making any changes in our bee rental prices for 2018.

Solar Farms Some open ground in our valley is being converted to solar installations. One of our growers is leasing 150 acres of open ground to a solar firm for \$780/acre annually. These prices will likely come down in the future but it's not difficult to imagine that large acreages (including almond orchards) on the water-short west side will be converted to solar farms in the future.

Take Time to Smell the Flowers Last week I took a trip to the coast via Hwy 58 (through Carizzo Plains, west of McKittrick). It's longer, time-wise than taking Hwy 46 but every 10 years or so winter and spring rains will produce a spectacular wildflower displays. This is one of those years. On the east side of our valley, oranges are in full bloom now, and are a major honey crop but one of our beekeepers took his bees to the Carizzo Plains and says his bees are making more honey than they would on the oranges and without the worry of pesticide applications or picking up nasties from a nearby beekeeper (and there is *always* a nearby beekeeper on CA orange locations. I saw 2 large solar farms along the way - the area is an ideal place for solar, with minimal rains most years, and without the winter fog common to our central Valley. Worth a trip before things dry out in May.

Nectarines and Almonds As mentioned in our March newsletter, there were severe losses of bees in Fresno County this year when nectarines were sprayed with carzol during full bloom, just before almonds started blooming. We had a similar problem in 2014, but no problem in 2015 or 2016. Carzol should be applied at night, according to the label (carzol has a 4 to 6 hour residual effect) but it is likely that a daytime application was the culprit this year, as it likely was in 2014. Early-blooming nectarines ripen in May and this early fruit commands a premium market price, which is why we are seeing more early-blooming nectarines. We place some bees in Kern County almond orchards within 2 miles of nectarines and have gotten some bee kill, but nothing like what occurred in Fresno County this year. When securing almond contracts in the future, ask your almond grower (or bee broker, including this one) whether there are nectarines within 3 miles of the almonds, and if there are, what precautions are being taken to mitigate spray damage to bees.

Thanks for your efforts this year. And best wishes for a bountiful honey crop in the coming months.

Joe Traynor

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