

**January 10, 2013 ALMOND GROWER**  
**NEWSLETTER** (Joe Traynor)

**2013 Bee Supply**

As we do every January, we will be making last-minute adjustments in our bee supply, cutting and filling as winter bee losses come into focus. Our + or - 5% on the number of bee colonies you contract with as allows us to book +5%, then cut back to -5% should conditions warrant.

**Current Bee Problems**

Getting strong bee colonies for almonds (8 to 10 frames of bees) will be a much tougher task for the 2013 season than it has been in recent years, for two main reasons. **1.** loss of the most effective chemical for varroa mite control. **2.** poor bee forage last year due to drought conditions in most bee areas.

The varroa mite has been the scourge of beekeeping since it was first found in the U.S. in 1987. Varroa mites not only kill or weaken honey bees directly, but also spread deadly viruses from bee to bee, from colony to colony and from apiary to apiary. The most effective varroa control chemical became unavailable in 2012 because the overseas manufacturer stopped production. Beekeepers that stockpiled the material in 2011 got good varroa control in 2012, but some beekeepers had to use alternate materials and found their colonies weakened to the point where many perished or were too far gone to nurse back to almond pollinating strength. There is a crying need for effective varroa-control products. The difficulty in controlling this pernicious pest with approved products is causing some beekeepers to improvise their own varroa treatments.

Drought conditions have left bee colonies in many areas in a weakened nutritional state, making them more susceptible to varroa mites and its associated viruses. This one-two punch from varroa and drought will result in above average winter losses of bees and overall weaker bee colony strength for almonds. Although it will be tougher this year, we are confident that we will meet our commitment to supply you with 8+ frame bee colonies. Some beekeepers are predicting \$200/colony bee rental prices for almonds for the few growers that haven't yet contracted for bees or for growers whose beekeepers jumped ship because they didn't feel they were getting a fair price. We are confident that our beekeepers will stick with us even though some will lose money this year due to the unforeseen problems outlined above.

**Bee Research Funding**

As you know, we collect \$1 each from growers and beekeepers to fund bee

research. We rented 34,682 colonies in 2012 and distributed research \$ as follows:

Project ApisM: \$51,000   Randy Oliver: \$10,000   USDA, Texas Bee Lab: \$8,130 (labor)

Project ApisM is a bee research leader; check them out at [www.projectapism.org](http://www.projectapism.org). Randy Oliver is a beekeeper/scientist in Grass Valley, CA; see his website at [www.scientificbeekeeping.com](http://www.scientificbeekeeping.com). Frank Eischen of the USDA Bee Lab does almond-bee work in Kern County every year. (Due to budget cuts the long-standing Texas Bee Lab is closing and Dr. Eischen is transferring to the USDA Bee Lab in Tucson, AZ).

### **The Benevolent Giant - Paramount and the Resnicks**

Its easy to root against Goliath and when the Resnicks (Stewart and Lynda) entered California ag as Paramount Farming and Paramount Citrus many of us cast a wary eye. The Resnicks ruffled feathers when they went their own way in marketing pistachios but today, with 3000#/acre yields at \$3/lb (and no bee expense!) pistachios are probably the most profitable of all ag crops. And *Cuties* are doing nicely. The Resnicks have been good stewards of the land, working closely with U.C. and generously sharing information with Valley growers. Unlike some, who trumpet relatively meager donations of other people's money (see above) the Resnicks have quietly given back to our Valley, funding schools in Delano and Avenal, re-vitalizing a moribund public park in the farm-worker hamlet of Lost Hills and providing college money for the children of their employees/workers who maintain good high-school grades (an example that other Valley growers have copied). The Resnicks have also given millions to UCLA medical facilities and student aid; and to the arts in Los Angeles. All in all, a remarkable record of generosity. Unlike some other members of the Billionaire's club, the Resnicks own no yachts (to my knowledge) and their life style is not lavish. As for sending Valley water to Los Angeles (their hometown) we'll give them a temporary pass - and wait for the 'splainin.

### **Running with the Resnicks**

Given their exceptional marketing skills, I've tried, via my contacts with Paramount Farming, to get the Resnicks to enter and revolutionize the honey business. Pomegranate juice has a somewhat tart taste (not that there's anything wrong with that) that could be leavened with the addition of honey. A pomegranate-honey spread could also be a real winner. I might just get into a marketing contest with the Resnicks with *Traynor's Pom-Honey Spread* if I can sneak the name past their legal team. Such a contest would, of course, be lopsided - I know far more about honey than the Resnicks - but never count the Resnicks out.

### **Global Warming**

Almost everyone now believes our planet is getting warmer. Time-lapse

photos of Arctic (and other) glaciers have convinced the few remaining holdouts. The great majority of scientists believe that global warming is caused by man, via CO2 emissions and with world population increasing, warming will accelerate. Although most people now believe in man-made global warming, probably 90% of growers and beekeepers are against the most practical remedy: a carbon tax.

A carbon tax, although costly, and a significant drain on the economy, would be a good investment if it could prevent some of the predicted consequences of a warmer planet (for California farmers, less snow-pack in the Sierras, premature melting of that snow pack and insufficient chilling of deciduous tree crops). Studies have shown that projected \$ losses from global warming would far exceed the \$ costs of a carbon tax and its associated drag on the economy. We think nothing about paying a hefty fee for fire insurance on our home, even though the odds of such a fire are over 1,000 to one against. The odds that global warming will have catastrophic consequences are far less than 1,000 to one, so why not buy some insurance in the form of a carbon tax?

Numerous books and articles have been written on this subject, most notably by Bill McKibben and James Hansen. The best book I've read is by Eric P. Grimsrud, *Thoughts of a Scientist, Citizen, and Grandpa on Climate Change*. Written in February 2009 it holds up quite well today. Its only 82 pages and can be read in a few hours. The man has the credentials; he knows his stuff and makes a persuasive case in clear, concise prose. See also, [www.350.org](http://www.350.org) and Google *ArkStorm California* (our Valley was under 10' of water during the winter of 1861-62; it could happen again). And for a recent different view on Global Warming, Google *Alaska Dispatch Global Warming*.

Global warming is a slow process that can be easily discounted today (esp. if today is colder than normal) but the projected temperatures 20, 30 and 80 years from now are truly frightening. If (when) our planet is on fire in 2100, you may be 6 feet under, but still able to hear the plaintive cries of your grandchildren and great grandchildren : "*couldn't grandpa have done something way back when?*"

Don't look for congress or the president to address global warming - too much oil, gas and coal money in those pockets - and a carbon tax has become the new 3<sup>rd</sup> rail of politics. Action will come only when enough concerned citizens, united, make sufficient noise to force action.

### **Promises Made, Promises Broken**

In 2008, candidate Barack Obama said that his election would mark the moment "*the rise of the seas began to stop and the planet began to heal.*"

President Obama, 2012: opens up part of Wyoming for coal production, pushes for more oil and gas drilling (in the Arctic, offshore and the U.S): "*You*

*have my word we will keep drilling everywhere we can....That's a commitment I make."*

### **Global Warming Increases Frost Hazard**

From an article by Charles Greene in the Dec. 2012 Scientific American: *"For the upcoming winter of 2012-2013, the cards appear to be especially stacked in favor of harsh weather outbreaks in North America and Europe. The record-setting Arctic sea-ice loss observed during this past summer should enhance the probability of cold Arctic air masses invading mid-latitude regions."* Loss of arctic sea-ice changes air circulation patterns, allowing cold arctic air to leak southward to the U.S. during winter (when almonds bloom).

### **Dust Cools the Planet**

It is an established fact that volcanic eruptions cool our planet – the debris scattered in the atmosphere blocks solar rays. Dust from ag operations does the same on a much smaller scale, so next time you get ticketed for excessive dust, explain that you're combating global warming (but you'll still have to pay the fine).

### **Shafter Station**

Most Kern County almond growers were formerly cotton growers (many still are) and can remember when the Cotton Research Station at Shafter was a bustling community. The Station currently resembles a ghost town, but there are signs that it could return to its former glory. San Joaquin Quality Cotton Growers, spearheaded by Greg Palla, has leased the station and will use a portion of it to continue cotton breeding work. They are looking for additional tenants to help pay the rent. A number of commodity groups have expressed interest. Should you know of potential tenants, contact Greg at [gregpalla@sjvqualitycotton.com](mailto:gregpalla@sjvqualitycotton.com)

### **Bee Forage**

Weather permitting, honey bees do quite well during almond bloom, but it is often feast to famine once almond bloom is over until citrus bloom starts in April. This month-long dearth of flowers often requires supplemental feeding, esp. last year. Even during citrus bloom, bees can become malnourished since citrus flowers have little or no pollen. Bees on citrus turn all that great almond pollen into brood as they load up with citrus nectar (unless the citrus site is overcrowded with bees, as many are). Bees can, and usually do look great on citrus but often crash afterwards unless they have access to a pollen source or are given supplemental protein feed. Increased corn and soybean acreage in the Midwest has turned previously good summer bee pasture (alfalfa, canola and clover) into marginal bee country. If you're interested in planting bee forage go to [www.projectapism.org](http://www.projectapism.org) and click on *forage* at the top of the screen.

### **Pruning Profits**

The record almond crops of the past two years are not surprising considering the increase in bearing acreage. What is a surprise are the record per-acre yields - close to 2600#/ac. for both 2011 and 2012 - well above the average of the previous 10 years. Two years ago, UC recommended minimal to no pruning. An increase in fruiting wood since that time could well account for the record yields.

### **Potassium Promotes Profits**

Water-running potassium (K) during the period of rapid nut-sizing (April-May) can boost yields.

### **Fungicides**

If you apply fungicides, try to apply them when there is little pollen in the orchard - a relatively short period of time. And keep in mind that Paramount Farming applies virtually no bloom-time fungicides to their Kern County orchards and still gets excellent yields.

### **We're Ready When You Are**

Beekeepers need a window of 2 to 3 weeks to transport their bees to almond orchards and we appreciate you giving us this window in the past. With minimal pruning, one of the biggest obstacles to placing bees - brush on roadways - has been mostly eliminated. We'll be in touch to schedule bee deliveries, or call us anytime.

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