

BEEKEEPER NEWSLETTER - March 16, 2018

Most Bees Released Unless we've told you differently, your bees have been released from almond orchards. There are still several growers that haven't released their bees as of this date; all of them have the later-blooming hardshell varieties. Some of these late-release orchards are adjacent to orchards with identical remaining bloom (petals, actually) where we have already removed the bees because no pollen remained in the orchard. Most growers are aware, and we've tried to convince them, that once the bees have collected the almond pollen from his orchard, the pollination game is over. Almond flowers produce most of their nectar *after* the flowers have been pollinated and it is understandable why some growers want to keep their bees when they see nectar collecting bees working what remains of aging blossoms. Growers that lost some of the early bloom to frost want to maximize set on the later bloom. Our growers pay top dollar for your bees so we try not to push them too hard on bee removal.

2018 Season We had ideal pollinating weather in January, sunny days with temps in the 70s, but the weather turned dicey once almond bloom started in February - cooler temperatures and less bee-flying time. Many predicted a flash bloom, which would have caused problems, but the bloom was spread out, allowing bees to accomplish the pollination job. A staggered bloom is caused by low winter chilling, warmer than normal daytime temps with little or no fog. The resulting spread-out bloom helped both growers and beekeepers this year. (A case can be made that global warming helped almond growers this year by staggering the bloom).

All our beekeepers report lots of almond pollen in their hives, indicating the bees did the job they were hired to do. Hives also heaved up on nectar, after the pollen was collected. Growers seeing nectar-collecting bees working flowers (or what remains of flowers) are understandably reluctant to release their bees but some are aware that the game is over when no pollen remains in the orchard. We don't argue (or try not to argue) with growers that keep their bees too long (not a problem for beekeepers that wait around for PNW apple bloom or Valley citrus, but an impediment for beekeepers that want to head south - maybe 20% of almond beekeepers).

Frost Damage to Some Orchards One or two cold nights in February damaged almond bloom; the damage was worse as you went north (esp. the Sacramento Valley) but also occurred in the San Joaquin Valley. Reports of frost damage have caused a spike in almond prices. We won't know the extent of the frost damage for another month or two. Late-blooming varieties (aka hardshells) suffered far less damage than the main varieties because their bloom was less developed when the frost hit.

Late-blooming varieties account for maybe only 15% of almond acreage because the price of their nuts is 10 to 20 cents a pound less than Nonpareil and other varieties. A major advantage of late-bloomers is that they spread the risk of poor weather impairing almond pollination during bloom. Some of our growers have both late and early-blooming varieties and as a result can cut down on bee numbers since they get almost double the use from the hives they rent -- late-blooming varieties bloom about 5 days after Nonpareil.

The frost this year could have been triggered by (wait for it): global warming! Warm arctic weather broke the dam holding back cold air masses, thus propelling them southward (google *Polar Vortex Global Warming* for more info).

Market Jitters The almond and bee industries form a classic symbiotic relationship - what affects one affects the other. If we get into a trade war, as some expect, farm commodities will suffer, esp. almonds, since most almonds are exported. Consider writing your congress person to express your concern.

