

## **March 18, 2016 --- BEEKEEPER**

### **NEWSLETTER**

#### **Fungicides and Bees**

The Almond Board, with an assist from Gordon Wardell, put out a 1-page sheet *Honey Bee Best Management Practices Quick Guide for Almonds* that advised growers to avoid daytime applications of fungicides and to never add IGRs (Insect Growth Regulators) to the tank mix. None of our growers used IGRs (mainly *Dimilin* and *Intrepid*) and many, maybe most, sprayed fungicides at night. The highest bee hazard from fungicides is when there is exposed pollen, and growers are aware of this. Daytime sprays are more common at petal fall and it is frustrating when growers won't release bees when no pollen remains in the orchard, but are less inclined to go to the extra time and expense to spray at night. The Almond Board has been a big help in reducing bee hazard from fungicides but some problems still remain - two of our beekeepers have reported that their almond bees haven't rebounded like they should, and they blame fungicides. Let us know if your almond bees haven't fully recovered.

#### **2016 Season**

El Nino took an unscheduled leave of absence in February and the great bloom weather gave record weight increases to almond bee colonies. There were spot shortages of almond bees with isolated reports of growers paying \$200 per colony for 3 and 4-frame colonies. These reports, combined with a drop in honey prices are causing some beekeepers to concentrate on building bee colony numbers rather than on honey production. Don't be surprised if the demand for almond bees drops in 2017.

#### **The Almond Market**

The rapid and precipitous drop in almond prices – from \$4/lb a few months ago to \$2/lb today – have left almond growers reeling. \$2/lb is the break-even point for many growers -- \$2.50/lb for some. \$4/lb almonds drove up the price of almond orchards to unheard of levels – some growers cashed out when they were offered \$35,000/acre and are very happy they did (just as a couple of beekeepers are smiling after selling their operations). Investors that came late to the almond game may have trouble getting financing from banks at current almond prices (in almost all cases, our growers are long-time established growers).

With low almond prices and high water costs, almond growing doesn't pencil out like it used to. Paramount/Wonderful recently pulled out 10,000 acres of almonds. Look for older orchards and orchards with declining yields (and/or expensive water) to be pulled after harvest this year.

### **Forage = Habitat = Forage**

Diminished bee forage has been rightly targeted as a significant factor in bee decline (and CCD). The honey bee industry has some powerful allies in addressing the problem and beekeepers should embrace their help. Some of the entities like Xerces and the *National Wildlife Federation* (NWF) use the term *Habitat* rather than *Forage* but the words are essentially identical for beekeepers. Get your *Wildlife Habitat Certification* by completing the NWF application form at [www.nwf.org/certifynow](http://www.nwf.org/certifynow).

I attended the March 10 field day at Paramount's Lost Hills ranch sponsored by UC, the Xerces Society and Paramount and featuring colorful habitat plots maintained by Paramount and supervised by Dr. Gordon Wardell for their Blue Orchard Bees. A similar field day was held in Zamora (Yolo County, near Davis) on March 15<sup>th</sup>. You may recall the 1997 book *The Forgotten Pollinators* by Stephen Buchman and Gary Nabhan, widely praised by environmentalists, but not by beekeepers because it painted honey bees as an evil bully that threatened to drive native bees to extinction. The Xerces people, esp. crop pollination coordinator Katharina Ullman, show no vestige of this misbegotten attitude. Xerces, the NWF

and others are aware that “we’re all in this together” and should work together to increase bee habitat.

Consider joining the NWF and getting a subscription to their award-winning magazine *National Wildlife*. If you (or a greenie friend) already subscribe, check out the April-May issue featuring habitat for native bees (with some great pictures).

### **2016, 2017 and Beyond**

With current recent rains, honey bee prospects in California look a lot better than in 2015. We won’t know about the Dakotas and Montana until later. Texas weather is always a crapshoot --- either too much, or not enough rain. Many feel that the high winter losses incurred by Dakota bees this year were due to delayed mite treatments which in turn were due to a late honey flow. A timely late-summer or September mite treatment is essential and is more important than getting that last drop of honey – don’t stoop over a dollar (from almond pollination) to pick up a nickel (from a few more pounds of honey). That late honey flow can also crowd the brood nest and the development of longer-lived young overwintering bees.

The 2016 almond crop looks good. We’re already into the nutlet drop season – the drop of pollinated nuts that trees are unable to carry. Warm, sunny days are needed to “hatch” these developing nuts. The potential damage from a late freeze won’t be over until mid-April.

Based on this year’s demand for almond bees, many beekeepers are thinking of raising 2017 pollination prices, a more difficult task at \$2/lb almonds than \$4 almonds. We are making no price changes for 2017.

Many predict that self-fertile almond varieties, esp. *Independence* will take over the almond industry. These varieties will still need maybe ½ colony of bees/acre but overall demand for almond bees will drop. Some predict 100,000 acres of self-fertile almond

orchards in 5 years – 300,000 acres in 10 years. Look for bee rental fees to drop if these predictions hold.

### **Livestock Pasture - Two Philosophies**

When cattlemen are faced with diminished pasture due to drought, they sell their cows rather than incur high feed bills. Under similar circumstances, beekeepers increase their numbers to get more almond-rental income and wind up with high feed bills and/or sub-par colonies.

### **Research \$**

As you are probably aware, each year we collect \$1/colony each from almond growers and beekeepers and donate the funds to bee research. In 2015, we rented 35,958 colonies and donated the collected funds as follows:

Project ApisM: \$55,000 (\$20,000 of which is divided between Bruce Lampinen (UC, Davis) and Frank Eischen (USDA) for almond pollination studies. Randy Oliver: \$13,000; Frank Eischen: \$4,000 (in labor).

We rented \$33, 590 colonies this year and will again make research donations during 2016. If you rent almond bees on your own, consider donating \$1/colony to research and asking your grower (or broker) to do the same.

### **Trucker Note**

A trucking outfit called me recently to solicit bee hauling business. They emphasized that they had their own nets and were experienced bee haulers. I know nothing about them, but, if interested, call (602)299-5108.

## **Stay in Touch**

We'll be in touch with our April newsletter. Call anytime in the meantime to let us know how you and your bees are doing. Your efforts this year (and every year) are noted, and appreciated.

JOE TRAYNOR