SRC Ag Alert!

COURTESY OF SENATOR JIM HONEYFORD

Ranking Republican Member, Water, Energy and Telecommunications Committee

July 24, 2008

Dear Friends,

In this issue of the "SRC Ag Alert" I want to update you on some of the pressing agriculture issues facing the state, including how legislation passed during the 2008 session is now affecting our state's farming community.

Legislature and private sector join forces to fight honeybee "colony collapse disorder"

Beekeepers Eric Olson of Yakima, left, and Tom Hamilton, of Nampa, Idaho, look over graduate student Mathew Smart's shoulder at an entomology laboratory at Washington State University. The beekeepers have donated seed money to underwrite research on colony collapse disorder. At right, Sam Hapke, a graduate student in entomology at Washington State University, counts bees as part of a research project on a parasite that attacks honeybees.

Keeping Washington buzzzzzing…

Honeybees don't just make honey; they pollinate a lot of our most important food crops, including apples, nuts, avocados, soybeans, asparagus, broccoli, celery, squash, kiwi, cherries, blueberries, cranberries, and cucumbers. In fact, about one-third of the human diet comes from insect-pollinated plants, and the honeybee is responsible for 80 percent of that pollination.

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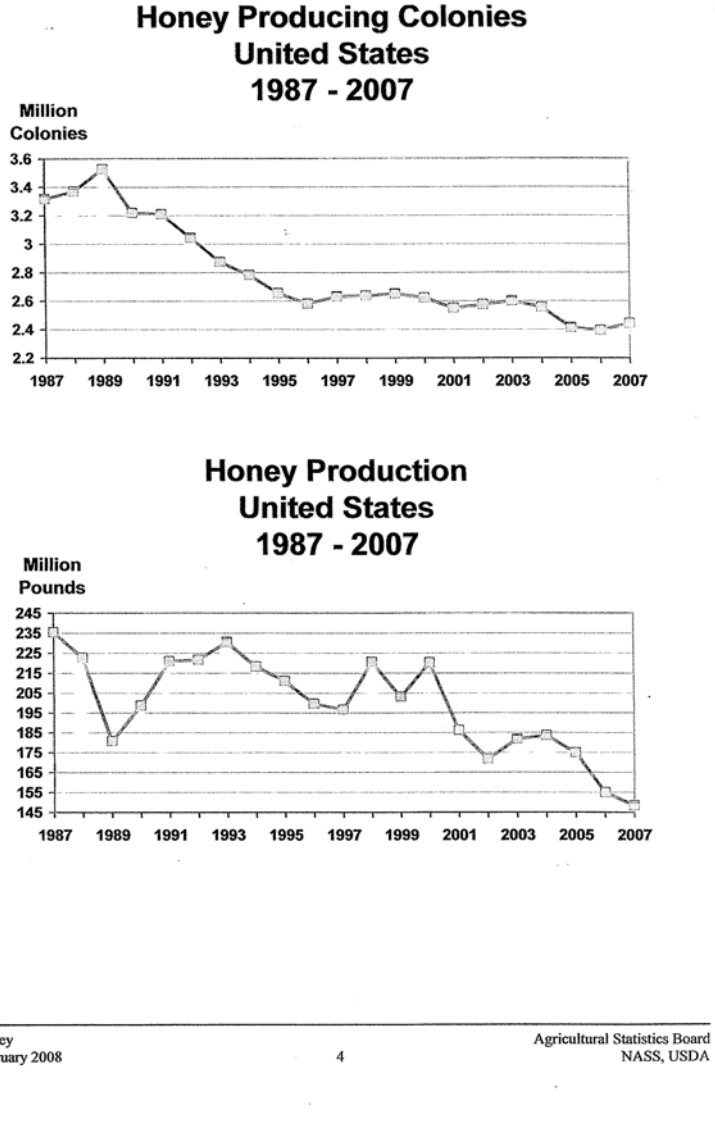
According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, in October 2006 beekeepers began reporting losses of 30-90 percent of their hives. While colony losses are not unexpected during winter weather, the magnitude of loss suffered by some beekeepers was highly unusual.

The number of managed honeybee colonies has dropped from 5 million in the1940s to only 2.5 million today, with the greatest losses coming since the 1990s. At the same time, the call for hives to supply pollination service has continued to climb.



Honey
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4

Agricultural Statistics Board
NASS, USDA

The mysterious honeybee-killing malady, given the name “colony collapse disorder,” has wiped out thousands of hives throughout the Pacific Northwest over the past several years. The Washington State Beekeepers Association estimates overall statewide losses to the disease at between 35 percent and 50 percent in recent years. Eight of Washington’s 10 most valuable crops rely on bee pollination, meaning colony collapse disorder could devastate our state’s agricultural economy.

Washington's beekeepers need relief to help them face this threat. In our state, businesses with activities subject to the B&O tax that generate less than $12,000 per year in gross income are not required to register with the Department of Revenue. This includes honey and bee products produced on a beekeeper's own farm. However, income from the sale of honey, pollination services and bee products produced off the farm could be required to be reported to the Department of Revenue and was subject to the B&O tax.

Senate Republicans responded with **Senate Bill 6468** to exempt pollination services, sales of bees and use of bees from the applicable state taxes – which, at a dollar per hive, really add up for beekeepers from east of the Cascades who bring their hives to Western Washington to pollinate berry plants and cranberry bogs. The legislation passed overwhelmingly.

The new law, which went into effect this month, exempts beekeepers from the following taxes:

the B&O tax on the wholesale sale of honey and honey bee products;
the B&O tax on bee pollination services; and
the sales and use tax on the sale of pollinating bees.

To qualify for these tax exemptions, beekeepers must be registered with the Department of Agriculture. These tax exemptions expire on July 1, 2013.

Washington State University scientists and beekeepers are also joining with legislators to find a solution to colony collapse disorder and help mitigate its effects. Two large beekeepers in the Pacific Northwest – Eric Olson of Yakima and Tom Hamilton of Nampa, Idaho – have made donations as seed money for the research. Noyes Apiaries in New Plymouth, Idaho, the Idaho Honey Association and the Washington State Beekeepers Registration Fund also have made contributions. With those donations and dedicated funds from the WSU Agricultural Research Center, researchers will spend nearly $200,000 over the next two years to look at causes and possible treatments for the disease.

On July 18th, Olson updated beekeepers, state officials and the public on status of the project.

According to the update, researcher Mathew Smart had a major breakthrough when he was able to distinguish two similar pathogens (*Nosema apis* and *Nosema ceranae)* from samples that were collected in alcohol. Previously, bees had to be frozen for this determination. The new process will greatly advance and simplify sampling in the field.

This month, the team began analyzing honeycomb for chemical residues and studying the possible effects on developing bees. They also are examining the nutrition of bees to evaluate the benefit of potentially using supplements to aid colony health.

The Colony Health Research Project plans on publishing new updates every 30-60 days.

When the Legislature reconvenes in January, Senate Republicans will be leading the fight to help ensure that this worthwhile project has the financial support to continue.

Budget increases funding for WSU ag research

The supplemental budget passed by the Legislature in March substantially increases funding for research and teaching on sustainable agriculture at Washington State University. The state approved at least $400,000 in additional funding for WSU's Biologically Intensive and Organic Farming (BIOAg) program, added several new staff positions to support value-added agricultural product research and increased research into sustainable food production.

WSU's request to the legislature included $800,000 for the BIOAg program as part of a $10.8 million initiative for new agricultural funding. The $400,000 final appropriation for BIOAg is part of a $6 million package in the budget for the initiative.

Ecology to hear public comments on Yakima water storage

The Washington State Department of Ecology is preparing a new environmental impact statement on ways to improve water supplies in the Yakima River Basin.

The study will build on the Yakima River Basin Water Storage Feasibility Study released earlier this year. The original study examined several water storage alternatives, including the Black Rock reservoir site east of Moxee.

The state has identified some initial projects to be considered in the new feasibility study. Fish passages at existing storage reservoirs and other structures will be evaluated; modifications to existing facilities and operations to optimize the basin's water supply will be explored; and habitat enhancements on the Yakima River and tributaries will be considered.

Agencies, affected tribes and members of the public may comment on the scope of the supplemental environmental impact study. Comments will be accepted on mitigation measures, probable significant adverse effects and licenses or other approvals that may be required. **The comment period will be open through next Wednesday, July 30**.

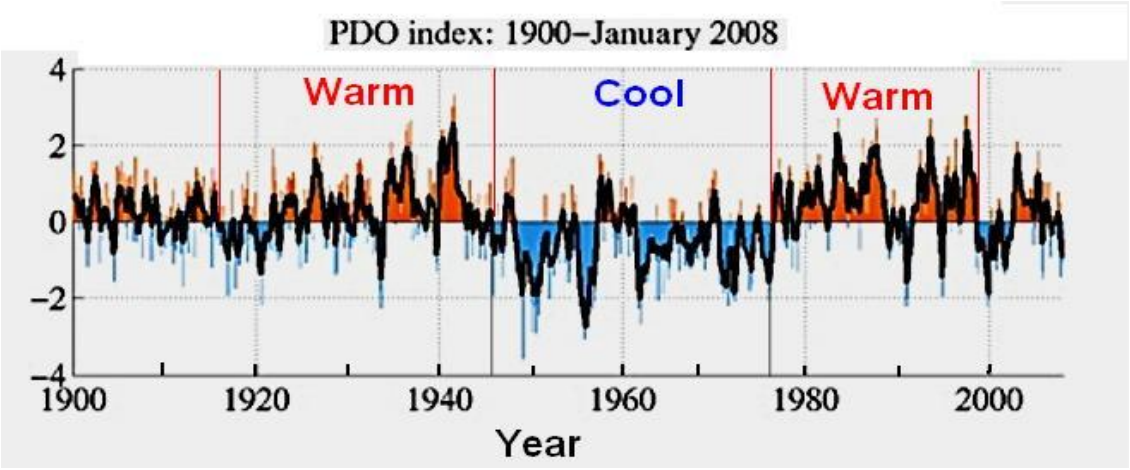
Written comments may be sent to: Derek Sandison, Central Regional Director, Department of Ecology, 15 West Yakima Avenue, Suite 200, Yakima, WA 98902-3452. Or emailed to: dsam461@ecy.wa.gov (please use “Yakima River Basin scoping comments” in the subject line).

“Global Warming Bill” may be sending us in the wrong direction

In March the Legislature passed Engrossed Second Substitute House Bill 2815 with a truckload of mandates that essentially tell people how they will live their lives – from where they will live, to the use of their cars, to what kind of jobs the state most favors. The measure is based on the belief that Earth is experiencing catastrophic, man-caused global warming.

At a July 15th conference on the environment, sponsored by the Washington Policy Center, Dr. Don Easterbrook, Professor Emeritus in the Department of Geology at Western Washington University, put that theory to the test.

He argued that we are actually in the middle of a 10-year cooling trend, which is part of an observable 500-year pattern connected to an ocean temperature variation called the Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO). Each time the PDO sets up in its warm or cool phase, global temperatures remain warm or cool for approximately 30 years. The 1977 switch from cool to warm PDO initiated the past 30 years of global warming.



According to his research, the recent switch from warm to cool PDO means global warming is over, and we can now expect 30 years of global cooling, perhaps severe (2-5°F). If Easterbrook's theory is true, there could be serious implications for Washington's agriculture community. For example, he predicts that beginning this year, global cooling will cause crop failures and serious food shortages.

In fact, Washington may already be seeing this cooling cycle. Our recent colder-than-average winters and late springs have already had an effect.

The U.S. sweet cherry production forecast is down 20 percent from 2007 and 15 percent below 2006. The Washington crop forecast is 36 percent below the 2007 production and 40 percent below the production in 2006. The crop suffered significant frost damage in April, and cold spring temperatures inhibited bee activity and pollination.

The quantity of all wheat stored in Washington is down 11 percent to 23.2 million bushels, 2.8 million bushels below a year ago. Wheat stored on-farm decreased from 750 thousand bushels in 2007 to 650 thousand bushels on June 1, 2008. A decrease was also seen in off-farm holdings from 25.2 million a year ago to 22.6 million bushels being held on June 1, 2008.

WSDA, WSU offer new tool to support farmers markets

In cooperation with the Washington State University Small Farms Program, the Washington State Department of Agriculture is distributing a 90-page Washington State Farmers Market Manual that has everything one needs to know to run a successful farmers market. The collaborative project included support from members of the Washington State Farmers Market Association, WSU and other university specialists, market managers and outside experts.

The manual lays out a step-by-step process for establishing a new farmers market, best market-management practices for existing markets and a strategic planning process to strengthen existing markets.

The growth of farmers markets is driven by consumer demand. The latest figures available, from 2006, show farmers markets reported $38 million in sales statewide.

To download a copy of the manual, go to http://agr.wa.gov/Marketing/SmallFarm on the WSDA Web site or visit the WSU Small Farms Program Web site at www.smallfarms.wsu.edu. Copies of the farmers market manual are available from WSDA by calling Patrice Barrentine at (360) 902-2057 or send an e-mail to smallfarms@agr.wa.gov.

Food safety audits of fruit and vegetable growers expanding

The Food and Drug Administration announced recently that jalapeño peppers distributed since June 30 by Agricola Zaragoza Inc. of McAllen, Texas have been recalled because of a link to the nationwide salmonella outbreak, which was earlier thought to be due to Mexican-grown tomatoes.

This is just the latest in a series of high-profile food-borne disease outbreaks that is causing an increasing number of concerned produce distributors, fresh fruit and vegetable farmers and consumers to seek a third-party verification of farm practices that reduce the risk of *E. coli*, listeria and other illnesses.

The Washington State Department of Agriculture is conducting a growing number of audits using USDA Good Agricultural Practices and Good Handling Practices. Through the process, WSDA's auditors verify that growers and processors are following best management practices to reduce the risk of microbial contamination of fresh produce. More than 128,000 acres of Washington produce were audited last year, up from 10,200 acres in 2005.

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While the audits are voluntary, an increasing number of national wholesalers and retailers are requiring GAP/GHP certification from the growers and processors from whom they source their foods. Federal nutrition programs, including the nation's school lunch program, began requiring GAP/GHP audits last year for all produce. Many international buyers are also looking for proof of the audit.

WSDA conducted 97 GAP audits in 2007, up from 16 audits the year before. In 2008, demand is expected to exceed last year's requests. Audits are valid for one year and are conducted on a fee-for-service basis.

Growers are beginning to request the service. Last year, WSDA auditors visited farms growing potatoes, apples, pears, sweet corn and onions. Growers of other commodities are likely to request audits this season.

WSDA has 22 licensed GAP/GHP auditors in central Washington. The WSDA auditors are also licensed fruit and vegetable inspectors who grade produce for quality. They also certify that international shipments of produce meet the export markets' requirements and are free from plant pests and diseases.

More information about GAP/GHP audits can be found at:
www.agr.wa.gov/Inspection/FVInspection.

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