

United States Senate

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April 13, 2007

The Honorable Michael Johanns
Secretary
US Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-0003

Dear Mr. Secretary:

America's beekeepers and their bees are an indispensable pillar of U.S. agriculture. Our nation's beekeepers provide essential pollination services for over 90 different food, seed and fiber crops, contributing over \$14 billion of added agricultural value as documented by a Cornell University study in 2000. Crops that depend upon or benefit from honey bee pollination include alfalfa, almonds, apples, avocados, blueberries, cantaloupes, carrots, cherries, citrus, cotton, cranberries, kiwis, plums, pumpkins, seed crops, soybeans, squash, sunflowers and watermelons.

As you are no doubt aware, a new and unexplained condition known as Colony Collapse Disorder ("CCD") is destroying bee colonies through the United States. CCD is causing some beekeepers to lose upwards of 90 percent of their bee colonies, and is causing serious reductions in the supplies of bees for essential commercial pollination. These severe losses are in addition to other problems such as higher production costs, mite infestations and unfairly traded imports that have been making it very difficult for beekeepers to operate profitably. If these alarming trends are allowed to continue, they will place at risk in excess of \$14 billion in annual U.S. farm output that depends on bee pollination. Ultimately, the shortage of pollination services could impact the supply of healthful and affordable food for U.S. consumers.

We are writing on an urgent basis to ask that you provide us with an expedited report on the immediate steps that the Department is and will be taking to determine the causes of CCD, and to develop appropriate countermeasures for this serious disorder. In particular, we ask for a specific explanation of how the Department plans to utilize its existing resources and capabilities, including its four Agricultural Research Service honeybee research labs, and to work with other public and private sector enterprises in combating CCD. We also request that the Department identify any additional resources and capabilities that would be necessary or useful in its efforts to stop the spread of CCD.

In addition, we would also ask that you outline the Department's long-term plans to help restore the health of the U.S. beekeeping industry, including implementation of a crop insurance program for beekeepers that Congress authorized in 2000.

We look forward to receiving your report and any recommendations on this urgent matter for U.S. agricultural producers and American consumers.

Sincerely,

Max Baucus

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