



**Statement of the
American Honey Producers Association, Inc.
for the
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, D.C.**

April 24, 2007

"If the bee disappeared off the surface of the globe
then man would only have four years of life left.
No more bees, no more pollination, no more plants,
no more animals, no more man."

Attributed to Albert Einstein

Chairman Harkin and Members of the Committee, my name is Mark Brady. I am from Waxahachie, Texas. I have been a commercial beekeeper for over 30 years. I am President of the American Honey Producers Association ("AHPA"). The AHPA is a national organization of beekeepers actively engaged in most commercial honey production and agricultural pollination throughout the country.

We appreciate this opportunity to testify before the Committee on the state of America's beekeeping and honey industry. We look forward to working with the Committee – in the context of the Farm Bill and otherwise – to help assure that our beekeeping sector can remain strong and that we can have healthy bees for honey production and vital pollination services. To assist Congress in this process, we offer a number of suggestions for addressing the many difficult problems faced by modern beekeepers and those who rely on honey bees for critical pollination services.

As the Committee is well aware, Colony Collapse Disorder ("CCD") has recently emerged as a new and serious threat to America's beekeepers and their honey bees. CCD is a highly destructive and still mysterious condition. Despite the tremendous work being done by government, academic and private sector researchers, there is much we still do not know about CCD and its causes. However, based on reports from beekeepers throughout the country, it is becoming increasingly apparent that CCD poses a serious and, perhaps, unprecedented threat to America's honey bee colonies. For beekeepers, bee losses are a harsh fact of life. Beekeepers often face serious bee losses from a variety of causes. However, the losses apparently related to CCD are much more widespread and severe, with some beekeepers reporting the disappearance or destruction of 90 percent of their honey bees.

Given the importance of commercial bee pollination to wide segments of U.S. agriculture, it is imperative that beekeepers, producers, researchers and the government continue to work together on an urgent basis to develop measures to combat CCD. In this regard, the AHPA very much appreciates the letter that Senator Baucus and 43 other Senators – including 17 members of this Committee – recently sent to Secretary Johanns seeking prompt action on CCD research.

Although CCD is a potentially grave problem, it is not the only problem facing our industry. We also face many other difficult challenges. These include, to name a few, treatment-resistant mites and pests, rapidly increasing demands for pollination, rising production costs, a history of price fluctuations that have eroded profits, environmental concerns, and unfairly traded imports. Together with CCD, these other serious issues should be a wake-up call to all of us about the critical importance of longer-term and sustained programs, strategies and solutions, as well as new ideas, to assure the continued health of both our honey bees and our vital beekeeping sector.

I. The State of the U.S. Honey Industry

A. *Honey Bee Population*

In the past few decades, U.S. commercial beekeepers have seen a worrisome and dramatic decline in the population of U.S. honey bees. According to a report released last year by the National Research Council, the population of American honey bees has plunged by 30 percent in the last 20 years. This staggering loss of managed honey bee colonies is one of the most severe declines U.S. agriculture has ever experienced in such a short period (and does not even reflect the latest impact from CCD). Most troubling, there are far fewer bee hives in the United States today than at any time in the last 50 years.

As the honey bee population has declined, so has the number of commercial beekeepers. Not surprisingly, commercial beekeepers supply the vast majority of the domestic honey consumed in the United States and the majority of pollination services. Today, the number of commercial beekeepers has fallen to an all-time low of 1,600. This drop in the number of commercial beekeepers corresponds with a steady decline in the number of colonies producing honey in the United States. In 2006, 2.39 million colonies produced honey, down 7 percent from 2004.

B. *Honey Production and Sales*

Honey bees, and consequently the U.S. honey industry, are indispensable to contemporary American agriculture. Although honey is produced in every state, North Dakota, California, Florida, South Dakota, Montana and Minnesota lead the nation in honey production. Chart 1 below lists the top six honey-producing states in 2006, and indicates the number of pounds produced and the value of production for each of these states.

