

**STATEMENT OF THE
CALIFORNIA FARM BUREAU FEDERATION (CFBF)
Before the
U.S. HOUSE AGRICULTURE SUBCOMMITTEE
ON HORTICULTURE AND ORGANIC AGRICULTURE**

Presented by
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My name is Paul Wenger. I am a 3rd generation farmer growing almonds and walnuts in Stanislaus County, just outside Modesto, California. My sons are actively involved in our farm operation so I look forward to a long future of our family working on the land.

I'm also the first vice president of the California Farm Bureau, a position that keeps me in close contact with farmers and ranchers throughout our state.

The California Farm Bureau is the state's largest general farm organization, representing more than 90,000 member families. We represent producers of all commodities and all sizes of operation. This forces us to take a broad view of what's important and how what might affect one commodity will impact another. That is certainly the case with the topic of today's hearing.

I appreciate the opportunity to address this committee. I commend Chairman Cardoza and the committee for taking time to review an issue that is very critical to us.

I have to admit that in addition to my Farm Bureau duties, I have a personal interest as well. As an almond grower and someone who pays \$130 per hive to pollinate my crop, I am personally concerned about the health of the bee industry.

Bees are the unsung heroes of our state's important almond industry that has an annual farm value of more than \$2.5 billion. Each year, in February and early March our almond trees require honey bees-more than one million colonies to produce a crop. Bees come to California from all over the United States. This demand for bee colonies feeds into what is a national network of beekeepers. Each year, as growers we worry about the supply of bees and what the weather is like during the critical pollination period. Our crop fortunes rise or fall on what happens. The size of our state's almond industry has been steadily rising from 400,000 acres in 1985 to nearly 600,000 bearing acres today. An additional 100,000 acres will come into production in the next few years.

The growth and success of our almond industry has served as a safety valve for our state's agricultural industry. When prices faltered in cotton, peaches, citrus, many of those acres moved into almonds. Almonds give us a way to maintain or increase our revenue per acre and it is done with fewer workers, another critical issue for California.

Almonds are almost unique to California. We are the dominant and nearly sole producer of almonds in the United States and around the world. Our state combines a special climate and infrastructure to maintain this dominance in an important value-added product. I'm sure that countries such as China, Spain or parts of South America would very much like to share in this market. So far we've been able to retain our dominance, but a healthy and productive bee industry will be key to our continued success.

While almonds may be the single biggest commodity to benefit from bees, it's not the only one. There are scores of other crops that also have a crucial or strongly beneficial reliance on bees. The list includes melons, cherries, avocados, Bartlett pears, bushberries, kiwi, many apple varieties, cucumbers, plums, prunes, pumpkin, squash, ornamental plants, and dozens of vegetable and flower seeds. Bees are critical to our alfalfa and Ladino clover seed industries. Alfalfa seed drives the hay industry that supports a \$4.5 billion dollar dairy industry. Beyond production agriculture, bees play an important role in home gardens and other indigenous plants so critical to birds and other wildlife.

We rely on bees foremost as pollinators, but California also has a thriving queen bee industry that supplies nearly a million queen bee packages to beekeepers around the country to revitalize their colonies. We produce more than 20 million pounds of honey annually. In 2005, the California honey bee industry generated \$176 million in direct revenue, while the value of crops pollinated exceeded \$6 billion and many associated jobs.

While the role of bees grows in importance, the research and technical support side of beekeeping has declined. I know you can't always make a direct correlation between loss of research dollars and growing disease and pest problems, but it has to be more than a coincidence that both are occurring. We need answers to the parasitic mites and colony collapse problems, but the health issue and the state of the industry is an even broader concern than that.

Through attrition, we are losing apiculture expertise at the professorial, research, and extension levels throughout the United States. We are losing this infrastructure at a time when it is vital to the ability to respond to major bee health concerns.

Let me provide some examples: attrition has severely impacted the bee research program at the University of California, Davis, with the loss of key researchers. Mr. Brandi will describe this in greater detail, but I want at least to point out that the California Farm Bureau has urged U.C. Davis to appoint faculty in apiculture in the Department of Entomology and to ensure that a specialist position is filled upon the retirement of the current statewide apiculture specialist.

When it comes to research there is a growing concern in the farm community over the dwindling support for production agriculture by the land grant universities. This is a trend that seems to exist across the board, including apicultural research

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Stepped up efforts on the part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture- Agricultural Research Service (ARS) on current health problems and other issues are vital. Over several years, we have expressed to Congress our support for the four USDA-ARS bee labs. We join the American Farm Bureau Federation in supporting research at these regionally located bee research centers to find solutions. Just this past September, we urged USDA to expedite its research effort to produce effective treatments controlling honey bee mites.

Research will be the key to overcoming the current problems. I would urge this committee to spearhead Congressional action to restore the honey bee industry to full health.

Thank you for the time and attention you are devoting to this important issue.