



Partners for Sustainable Pollination

March 12, 2009

TO: USDA NAREEE Specialty Crop Committee
ATTN: Bruce Mertz, Acting Director, NAREEE Advisory Board
Shirley Morgan, Program Coordinator

FR: Kathy Kellison, PFSP Executive Director

RE: Public Input to Study of REEE Needs of Specialty Crop Industry, March 13 Listening Session
Recommendation: *Research on Specialty Crop Pollinators Critical*

Partners for Sustainable Pollination (PFSP) urges the USDA NAREEE Specialty Crop Committee to specifically identify research and extension on specialty crop pollinators, and in particular managed honey bees, as a priority objective. We urge that this also be reflected in the report being prepared on the U.S. Specialty Crop Industry's research, extension, education and economics needs.

PFSP is a volunteer-based nonprofit headquartered in Santa Rosa, California that is dedicated to improving the health of honey bees through a collaborative approach involving beekeepers, growers, scientists and land management agencies with a concurrent objective of contributing to restoring native pollinator populations.

It is well established that pollination of many specialty crops is heavily dependent on managed honey bees, and that the specialty crop pollination services they provide can no longer be assured due to a complex of pest and disease issues, including Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD). It is conservatively estimated that over \$15 billion in specialty crops are pollinated by managed honey bees in the U.S. Additional research and extension efforts are needed to help develop the science-based solutions and practices needed for both beekeepers and growers to assure healthy honey bees and reliable, cost-effective pollination services for specialty crops. PFSP recommends that improving forage for honey bees be included as an important research objective.

The following points lay out a compelling case for the need to invest in research, extension and education on honey bees and bees as specialty crop pollinators:

- Many key specialty crops are almost totally reliant on the services provided by beekeepers and their managed honey bees.
- Honey bees and their beekeepers are clearly in trouble, and the ag pollination services they provide are at risk.
- Improving natural forage for honey bees and native pollinators is a proven method of contributing to their health and sustainability.
- As documented below, the authority to use farm bill research funds, including from the Specialty Crops Research Initiative (SCRI), is clearly provided and intended in the new farm bill .

Congress recognized the need for increased research on managed and native pollinators in 2 sections of the 2008 Farm Bill. First, \$100 million was authorized over 5 years for a new pollinator research provision in the Research Title. Second, the Congress went further by adding specialty crop pollinators as a specific objective of the newly established Specialty Crops Research Initiative:

Specialty Crop Research Initiative

“(b) ESTABLISHMENT.—There is established within the Department a specialty crop research and extension initiative to address the critical needs of the specialty crop industry by developing and disseminating science-based tools to address needs of specific crops and their regions, including—

“(1) research in plant breeding, genetics, and genomics to improve crop characteristics, such as—

.....

“(2) efforts to identify and address threats from pests and diseases, including threats to specialty crop pollinators;... [emphasis added]

Statement of Managers:

The House bill adds a new section, 413, to AREERA that establishes the Specialty Crop Research Initiative to develop and disseminate science-based tools to address the needs of specific crops and their regions, including work in plant breeding and genetics, safety, quality, and yield; efforts to identify and address threats posed by invasive species; marketing; **pollination**; and the Conference substitute adopts the House provision... [emphasis added]

Since to date appropriators have not funded the pollinator provision in the Research Title, it is important for the Specialty Crop Research Initiative to include specialty crop pollination as an important goal.

Ag pollination services are critical to the future of many specialty crops in a number of key ag states and across the U.S. PFSP believes these services are clearly at risk if we do not take decisive action to protect and sustain honey bees, beekeepers and native bees. We continue to neglect this vital part of agriculture at our own peril.