



## Partners for Sustainable Pollination

February 3, 2009

The Honorable A.G. Kawamura, Secretary  
California Department of Food and Agriculture  
1220 N Street  
Sacramento, California 95814

### **RE: Ag Pollination Services Should Be Included in CA Ag Vision 2030**

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I am writing to urge the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) to strengthen the current draft California Agricultural Vision 2030 (CA Ag Vision) by adding appropriate mention of ag pollination services. Partners for Sustainable Pollination (PFSP) recommends the following—

- **Stewardship Goals:** Include appropriate mention of **ag pollination services** in the stewardship goals;
- **Action Items:** Add **habitat/forage improvement for honey bees and other ag pollinators** as an action item; and
- **Task Forces:** Looking ahead to the implementation phase, invite representatives for **beekeepers and other key ag pollinator stakeholder groups** to participate in the task forces when formed and to help do the necessary hard work to transform the vision into the actions required to realize that vision.

PFSP is a volunteer-based nonprofit headquartered in Santa Rosa 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.

Many key specialty crops are almost totally reliant on the services provided by honey bees and their beekeepers. Yet ag pollination services in California and across the nation have been largely taken for granted. Our nation's honey bees, and the beekeepers that deliver their services, are seriously threatened. There are increasing indications that native pollinators are also at risk. Honey bees are succumbing in record numbers, jeopardizing the continued viability of our commercial pollination industry and reliable and affordable pollination services to the U.S. agricultural community.

Ag pollination services are critical to the future of California agriculture, and these services are clearly at risk if we do not take decisive action to protect and sustain honey bees, beekeepers and native pollinators. We continue to neglect this vital part of California agriculture at our own peril. Absent a decisive commitment to such action, PFSP believes that the CA Ag Vision is fundamentally—and perhaps fatally—flawed, placing the future vision of a vibrant California agriculture at risk.

At the national level, stakeholders and the federal government have recognized the importance of taking action to protect and sustain pollinators and are already taking action. An important example is the first-ever addition of research and conservation provisions for managed and native pollinators to the 2008 farm bill.

Success is ultimately local, and ag pollination services are more vital to the success of agriculture in California than in any other state. The importance of honey bees in California is recognized in part through California Food and Agriculture Code Section 29000-29103:

“The Legislature hereby finds and declares that: A healthy and vibrant apiary industry is important to the economy and welfare of the people of the State of California. Protection and promotion of this important industry is in the interest of the people of the State of California.”

Some programs to help the apiary industry are in place. However, we can and must do more. Indeed, ag pollination services represent an essential underpinning to a successful agricultural sector in California, both now and in 2030 and beyond. We in California who care about the future of our agricultural sector would be remiss if we do not do our part by taking action. The health of honey bees can no longer be only a beekeeper problem. As humans, we want to use the bees to meet our needs, but do not take ownership for the responsibility for ensuring their well being and their right to thrive.

Beekeepers Essential Part of Ag Pollination Services: It is important to understand that the sustainability of ag pollination services goes beyond the bees to include the beekeepers that manage honey bees and deliver essential pollination services to specialty crops that are vitally dependent on honey bees for pollination. Many key specialty crops are almost totally reliant on the services provided by beekeepers. Unfortunately, the commercial beekeeping businesses that provide such services are struggling to remain viable. While the unprecedented losses from Colony Collapse Disorder are currently making headlines, beekeepers have been challenged by multiple problems, including pests and diseases, low prices for their services and products and a changing landscape that means a major deficit in suitable forage for the bees when not providing ag pollination services.

Action to Enhance Habitat/Forage Critical: While honey bees and native bees can be regarded as an agricultural input akin to tractors and fertilizer, they are unique in that they are a biological input that requires maintenance and nutrition throughout the year. They can't just be put on the shelf until they are needed for the next pollination season.

Unlike other sectors in agriculture, most beekeepers do not have control over the land they need to nourish and manage and nourish their bees. They are essentially “guests” of other landowners and dependent on others to provide safe habitat and practices needed for bee forage and healthy honey bees. Historically, beekeepers have had access to bee forage after their bees finish pollinating crops for the season. Over the decades, urbanization, changes in agricultural practices, including agrochemical choices, and at times restoration projects, have decreased the amount of acreage or sites available to beekeepers. Beekeepers are not in a position to own outright the necessary lands needed to provide forage for their colonies. Therefore, beekeepers must seek permission to find suitable and safe areas to “pasture” their bees. The impact of the lack of availability of natural forage and resulting poor nutrition on the health of honey bees is well documented.

Poor nutrition is widely agreed by entomologists, including UC-Davis entomologist Eric Mussen and ARS researcher Judy Chen, to be the greatest “stressor” on honey bees. A substandard diet increases vulnerability to viruses and pathogens, and negatively affects overall adult honey bee vitality and longevity essential to colony survival in order to successfully perpetuate from winter into spring. It is sadly ironic that a species we rely on so heavily for the most nutritious portions of our food supply is suffering from malnutrition.

Action Option—Ag Pollinator Habitat Task Force, Goal of 500,000 Acres of Bee Habitat: One action that could be incorporated into the CA Ag Vision is establishment of an Ag Pollinator Habitat Task Force to coordinate efforts to create and/or maintain suitable pollinator habitat, or “pasture,” on agricultural and other managed lands of the State, with a stated goal of identifying 500,000 acres of suitable bee forage on or near agricultural lands. Last year PFSP submitted a petition to you urging that such a task force be established. The petition was signed by 24 organizations and leading individuals—including the California Farm Bureau, beekeeping organizations at the state and national levels, and leading scientists.

PFSP believes this is a realistic and achievable goal. There are over 110 million acres in California with some 28 million dedicated to agriculture. The goal would be to identify less than ½ percent of California’s total acreage to help provide critical forage for honeybees and native pollinators. This does not mean that acreage must be found that can be dedicated exclusively as bee pasture. Vegetation and management practices can be augmented on and near ag lands without sacrificing crop production, and public lands and rights-of way offer potential.

Stakeholder Participation: Looking ahead to the implementation phase, PFSP recommends that key stakeholder groups representing ag pollinators and pollination services be invited to be at the table when stakeholder task forces are assembled. PFSP believes a pollinator perspective will be especially important to the objectives of the following task forces:

- Conservation and land use [habitat]
- Resources [pollinators vital resource]
- Plant and animal diseases [pests and diseases impacting bees; imports]
- People [beekeepers essential part of ag workforce]
- Regulation [include access to habitat on public lands for honey bees; pesticide regulations]

The ag pollination perspective should also be recognized and considered in the work of other task forces, including—renewable energy [must be sustainable, don’t destroy habitat, maintain biodiversity], food safety [don’t destroy habitat], trade/marketing [bee friendly labeling].

I had the privilege of presenting testimony on behalf of PFSP at one of the CA Ag Vision listening sessions inviting public input last year and tried to make the case for including ag pollination services. PFSP believes the responses offered to the questions raised in that process bear repeating:

- *What is your vision for California agriculture by 2030?*  
PFSP’s vision for California agriculture in 2030 must include healthy honey bees and a viable beekeeping industry. Without pollination, there is no crop in many California specialty crops.
- *What will be the biggest challenge in achieving that vision?*  
One of the biggest challenges to providing healthy pollinators and sustainable ag pollination services will be providing adequate bee pasture to support and sustain a locally based honey bee population that is better able to resist pests and diseases.

- *In 2030, how has the public perception of agriculture changed?*  
The public in 2030 can and must not only appreciate the vital partnership role of honey bees and native pollinators in producing the nutritious food and wildlife ecosystems, but will be inspired to take individual actions to help provide bee habitat, even in their own back yards.
  
- *What is a "must have" in an Ag Vision for California?*  
PFSP believes a “must have” for the future wellbeing of California agriculture is that CDFA must lead now in fostering partnerships and providing incentives to facilitate necessary increases in bee pasture to ensure an Ag Vision of a strong and vibrant agriculture in California in 2030.

PFSP appreciates CDFA’s leadership in shaping a CA Ag Vision and hopes the final CA Ag Vision will embrace a commitment to actions to protect and sustain ag pollinators, and in particular a plan to improve pollinator habitat and access to adequate forage for the California’s hardworking and caring beekeepers. We stand ready to work with CDFA and other stakeholders to achieve these important ends. Agricultural producers and natural ecosystems that need pollination services, and ultimately consumers of the food produced, will benefit.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Kathy Kellison, Executive Director  
Partners for Sustainable Pollination  
1828 Beaver Street  
Santa Rosa, CA 95404  
(707) 321-4711  
[kathy@partnersforsustainablepollination.org](mailto:kathy@partnersforsustainablepollination.org)