

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 18, 2019

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We write to express concern and request information regarding the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service's (NASS) decisions to suspend or reduce the collection of important honeybee data across our nation.

In July NASS announced that it would suspend the collection of quarterly data for the annual Honey Bee Colonies report. The Honey Bee Colonies report, first published in 2016, is the only national survey tracking honeybee loss that is overseen by the federal government. It not only provides key data to beekeepers, the honey industry, and farmers whose crops rely on honeybees for pollination but also helps to guide honeybee management decisions and identifies colony health stressors. USDA's recent announcement that it would resume the Colony Loss Survey, following a one-quarter suspension, to inform the Honey Bee Colonies report is welcome news. However, USDA's prior actions to suspend or scale back the collection of additional honeybee data remains a concern.

Earlier this year the USDA announced it would scale back the data collected for the Honey survey to exclude operations with less than five honeybee colonies. Prior to this announcement NASS had been collecting data on all sizes of operations since 2016. The Honey survey provides information on honey production, number of honey producing colonies, yield per colony, the price of honey, and price per queen bee. Additionally, late last year USDA announced that it would suspend the Cost of Pollination Survey. The Cost of Pollination Survey, first published in 2016, tracks how much farmers are paying for pollination services and identifies the monetary value of pollinators.

According to the NASS website, the decisions to scale back or suspend these surveys were "necessary given available fiscal and program resources." However, these actions by USDA are particularly concerning given how much our agricultural industry and society depend on pollinators. It is estimated that one-third of our food supply relies on honeybees for pollination. The information provided by these surveys allows valuable insight into a critical agricultural commodity that is estimated to be worth \$20 billion to U.S. crop production.

To help us better understand these decisions and affirm that they are the result of limited fiscal and program resources, we request the following information by October 2, 2019:

- The Fiscal Year 2019 funding amount that Congress provided NASS to collect information for the Cost of Pollination Survey and the Honey survey.
- The amount of money that remained in the budget for the aforementioned surveys at the time that NASS announced the decisions to suspend or scale back each of these surveys.
- The cost savings incurred by NASS to scale back or suspend these surveys.
- The current location of the cost savings incurred because of these decisions.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



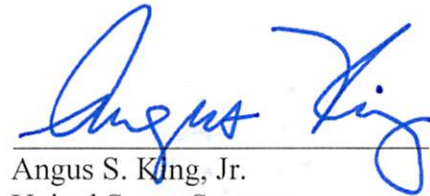
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