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It's World Bee Day and Commercial Beekeepers Are Calling for a Simple, Powerful Solution to Save the Bees

Sacramento, CA – Today is World Bee Day, a time dedicated to raising awareness about the importance of pollinators. While efforts to save bees tend to focus on encouraging people to plant backyard bee gardens, commercial beekeepers in California are seizing the moment to emphasize the critical need for a larger-scale solution they say will help reverse the massive bee die-off experienced this past year.

"While backyard bee gardens are wonderful for supporting native bees and small, local pollinator populations, they are simply not enough for the vast foraging needs of commercially managed honeybee colonies," said Ryan Burris, President of the California State Beekeepers Association. "What commercially managed honeybees need is access to large, diverse, chemical-free forage lands and this is something that's become increasingly unavailable to commercial beekeepers in California."

The plight of honeybees has been widely reported in the news in recent months. The latest data indicates that commercial beekeepers across the country lost 62 percent of their hives between June 2024 and March 2025. The situation has beekeepers and farmers worried that commercially managed honeybee populations won't be adequate to meet California's large pollination needs in the not-too-distant-future unless something is done to stop the decline.

Scientists and industry experts are working to determine exactly what's causing these recent losses. For decades, beekeepers have watched their colonies struggle against a perfect storm of challenges, from habitat loss and pesticide exposure to pests and disease.

Commercial beekeepers work diligently to care for the bees and keep them safe, but the costs to do so are high.

"The costs associated with proper beekeeping have only increased over the years, making it more and more difficult to sustain healthy colonies," explains Burris. "The situation is exacerbated by the fact that we have limited access to adequate forage."

"Commercial beekeepers in California tend to be small family-owned businesses who have been raising bees for generations," says Burris. "We've known for a long time that adequate nutrition is critical to our bees' survival, but now it's more important than ever that we spread the word and advocate for more space for our bees."

In today's modern large-scale agriculture, farmers rely primarily on managed honeybees and commercial beekeepers to provide pollination services critical to producing crops. No where is this more important than in California, the largest agricultural state in the nation, where pollination needs far surpass what could be done by native pollinators. The job here can only be done by large numbers of commercially managed bees.

“California beekeepers manage approximately 600,000 bee colonies,” explains Jason Miller, a beekeeper and honey producer from Placer County. “Each spring, 2 million additional beehives are trucked in from throughout the U.S. for California’s massive almond bloom. These out of state bees return home after pollination season is over. California beekeepers stay here, but we need a place to keep our bees the rest of the year when they’re not pollinating crops. Ideally, what our bees need are large open spaces with diverse forage that will provide them with nutrition to keep them healthy and strong for the next season’s pollination.”

But access to this open space is becoming less and less available to commercial beekeepers. As a result, beekeepers have had to resort to feeding their bees sugar and other additives that are costly and less than optimal making the bees more susceptible to all kinds of stressors.

“In recent years, some well-intentioned efforts to support pollinators have created new challenges for commercial beekeepers,” explains Trevor Tauzer, a beekeeper from Northern California whose family has kept bees on the same forage lands for generations. “Concerns about competition between honeybees and native pollinators have led to reduced access to areas that historically provided essential forage for managed colonies.”

Tauzer points out that commercial honeybees are not inherently in conflict with native species. “Emerging research shows that when there’s abundant and diverse forage, native and managed bees can thrive side by side. But when forage is scarce, all pollinators suffer,” he says.

Access to high-quality forage—especially on public lands—is critical for commercial beekeepers who remain in California year-round.

The situation is getting worse. As recently as 2014, President Obama issued a memorandum establishing the Pollinator Health Task Force, co-chaired by the USDA and EPA, to address the decline in pollinator populations. This led to the 2015 National Strategy to Promote the Health of Honeybees and Other Pollinators, which emphasized improving pollinator habitats, including on public lands. But these strategies were never implemented.

“Historically, these lands played an important role in keeping bees healthy outside of pollination season,” Tauzer continues. “However, increasing regulatory and administrative barriers are making it difficult for beekeepers to continue this practice, even though these areas are often pesticide-free and rich in floral diversity.”

Tauzer emphasizes that commercial beekeepers support efforts to protect native pollinators and value the contributions of all who care about bees.

“We believe the path forward is not exclusion, but expansion—creating more space and better habitat for *all* pollinators,” he says. “With the right science-based strategies, we can share the landscape in a way that benefits native species, commercial operations, and the broader food system.”

The California State Beekeepers Association (CSBA) has pledged to make gaining access to forage land one of their primary goals.

“Public lands offer ideal forage conditions for bees because they are pesticide free, they often have water and many public lands are open to cattle grazing contracts. So, why can’t bees graze on public lands too?” says CSBA’s Burris. “Bees contribute to the landscape on public lands by pollinating native plants so that more grow. And since nutrition is vital for the health of native pollinators, not just managed honeybees, increased plant growth would benefit broader pollinator communities.

“It’s a win-win,” he says. “Commercially managed bees are absolutely essential to producing food. By educating the public and policymakers about the importance of saving commercially managed bees – we’re not just helping bees, we’re helping feed the country."

What Can the Public Do to Support Bees?

Planting a bee garden in your backyard is never a bad idea. They do support local pollinator species and they're beautiful. But backyard bee gardens offer little benefit for commercially managed honeybees who make our food supply possible. Here are a few things you can do to support commercially managed bees:

1. **Buy American Made Honey**

One of the simplest, best, and most delicious ways you can support commercial beekeepers is to buy American-made honey. California is the third largest producer of honey in the U.S. But American honey producers face stiff competition from an influx of imported foreign honey sold at prices below what is possible for U.S. beekeepers. In recent years, imported honey has often been found to be fraudulent and may not be honey at all. Nearly all California honey producers rent their beehives to farmers for pollination purposes as a way of generating increased income to support their businesses. You can support them too by checking the label to make sure you're buying real, American-made honey.

2. If You've Got Some Land – Consider Giving Bees a Home

If you're a landowner, consider making a deal with a local commercial beekeeper to forage their bees. This goes for private landowners and businesses with large equipment yards or other undisturbed space. The ideal forage land for commercially managed honeybees should have the following characteristics:

- Diverse plant and floral sources
- Low pesticide use
- Clean, accessible water for hydration and cooling
- Mild, stable temperatures with low wind and humidity
- Ample room for equipment to move hives.

3. Share Our Story

Real change in securing forage land for commercially managed bees must come from our state's policymakers. But it's important for the general public to understand challenges faced by commercial beekeepers and what's at stake for our food supply. We encourage you to learn more and share it with others. Follow us on Facebook or Instagram and visit our website for more information.