

October 23, 2013

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry 328A
Senate Russell Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Ranking Member
Agriculture Nutrition, & Forestry 328A Senate
Russell Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Cc: The Honorable Tom Harkin
The Honorable Pat Leahy
The Honorable Max Baucus
The Honorable Amy Klobuchar
The Honorable Michael Bennett

The Honorable Sherrod Brown
The Honorable John Hoeven
The Honorable Pat Roberts
The Honorable John Boozman
The Honorable Saxby Chambliss

Dear Conferees:

We, the undersigned 58 organizations and businesses, write to express strong support for a pollinator protection provision, Sec. 11315, in H.R.2642 the Federal Agriculture Reform and Risk Management Act of 2013. If passed into law, Sec. 11315 would greatly improve federal coordination in addressing the dramatic decline of managed and native pollinators as well as direct the government to regularly monitor and report on their health.

As you may know, in the United States, pollination services contribute \$20-30 billion in agricultural production annually. In North America, honey bees pollinate nearly 100 kinds of fruits, including many specialty crops like almonds, cranberries, oranges and apples. Yet, over the past decade, there has been an alarming decline in honey bee populations around the world, with many colonies collapsing mysteriously. This phenomenon includes the syndrome known as “Colony Collapse Disorder” (CCD) and has been linked to a variety of factors, including: pesticides, pathogens, parasites, poor nutrition and habitat loss.

Some beekeepers have documented bee kills between 50-70 percent this year, and some lost 100 percent of their operations. A recent government-sponsored survey indicated that, on average, U.S. beekeepers lost 45.1 percent of the colonies in their operation during the winter of 2012/2013. These extreme losses—the worst documented since the advent of CCD—are a clear indication that deliberate action must be taken to protect honey bees and beekeeping operations across the country.

Honey bees are not the only pollinator at risk: the health of native pollinators is also jeopardized by similar stressors adversely impacting honey bees. There are thousands of other pollinating species, including numerous U.S. native bees, such as bumble bees, as well as butterflies, flies, beetles and several important bird and bat species.

Some of these species are experiencing declines worse than those faced by honey bees and are equally critical to agricultural production. The loss of native pollinators is therefore a significant threat to agriculture as well, yet there is no thorough monitoring of these losses by Federal agencies.

Sec. 11315 was offered as an amendment to the farm bill by Representatives Alcee Hastings and Marcy Kaptur and passed by an overwhelming margin of 273-149. The amendment was nearly identical to an amendment offered by Senator Barbara Boxer to the Senate farm bill that did not receive a vote. This provision in H.R. 2642 would be a significant step towards ensuring the long-term viability of populations of honey bees, wild bees, and other beneficial pollinators through several initiatives, including:

- Establishing better inter-agency coordination on pollinator health;
- Creating a USDA task force on bee health and commercial beekeeping ;
- Directing Federal agencies to provide guidance on issues related to pollinator health;

- Monitoring and reporting on health and population status of managed and native pollinators, including bees, birds, bats and other species; and
- Assessing the feasibility for new public bee research labs, among other things.

Maintaining healthy populations of honey bees and other pollinators is essential for the long-term success of American agriculture. As you begin your process for reconciling the agriculture titles of the 2013 farm bill passed by the House and Senate, the undersigned organizations and businesses strongly encourage the inclusion of Sec. 11315 to ensure that we continue to protect our nation's critical pollinating species.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Humane Biotechnology
 Alliance for Natural Health USA
 American Beekeeping Federation
 American Bird Conservancy
 American Farmland Trust
 American Honey Producers Association
 Amy's Kitchen
 Annie's, Inc.
 Ashland Food Co-op
 Beyond Pesticides
 Californians for Alternatives to Toxics
 Center for Biological Diversity
 Center for Environmental Health
 Center for Food Safety
 Center for Media and Democracy's Food Rights
 Network
 Central Co-op, Seattle
 Certified Naturally Grown
 Cornucopia Institute
 Ecological Farming Association
 Endangered Species Coalition
 Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance
 Fig Food Co.
 Food and Water Watch
 Friends of the Earth
 Greenpeace
 Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
 Institute of Neurotoxicology & Neurological
 Disorders
 Label GMOs
 Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service
 MOMS Advocating Sustainability
 National Association of Conservation Districts

National Farmers Union
 National Wildlife Federation
 Natural Resources Defense Council
 Nature's Path Foods Inc.
 Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society
 Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance
 Northeast Organic Farming Association Interstate
 Council
 Northeast Organic Farming Association –
 Massachusetts
 Northeast Organic Farming Association – New
 Hampshire
 Northeast Organic Farming Association – New York
 Northeast Organic Farming Association – Rhode
 Island
 Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides
 Organic Consumers Association
 Organic Farmers' Agency for Relationship
 Marketing, Inc.
 Organic Seed Alliance
 Organic Seed Growers and Trade Association
 Organic Trade Association
 Pesticide Action Network North America
 Pheasants Forever, Inc.
 Pollinator Partnership
 Pollinator Stewardship Council
 Quail Forever
 Sierra Club
 Socially Responsible Agricultural Project
 Sustainability Associates
 United Natural Foods Inc.
 Xerces Society

Cc:

Rep. Frank D. Lucas, Chairman of the House Agriculture Committee
 Rep. Collin Peterson, Ranking Member of the House Agriculture Committee
 House Members of the farm bill conference committee