

Honey production up in 2014, but colony losses continue

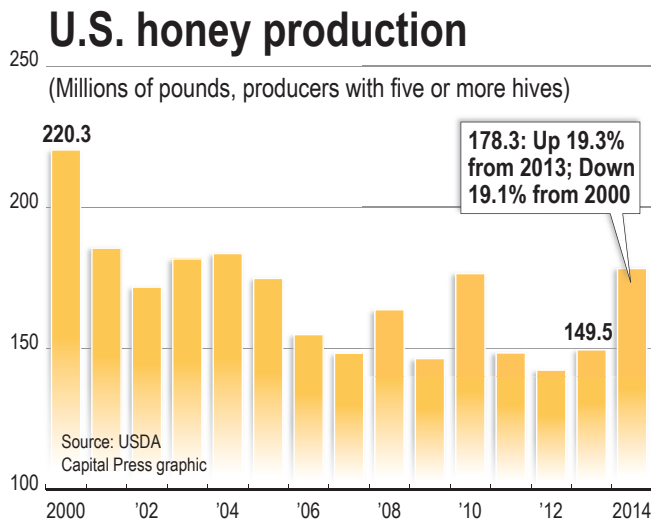
By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

Industry insiders are attributing an increase in honey production last year to ideal conditions, and say colony collapse is not abating.

U.S. honey production in 2014 was up 19 percent year over year to 178 million pounds with a per-colony increase of 15 percent.

The number of colonies producing honey also increased, up 4 percent to 2.74 million, according to USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service. "It was an exceptional year" for honey production in many areas, said Darren Cox, president of Cox Honey of Utah and president of the American Honey Producers Association.

A combination of factors,



including rain and temperature, allowed for good clover yields and a lot of nectar, said Dennis van Engelsdorp, assistant professor of entomology at the University of Maryland and director of Bee Informed Partnership, supported by a

USDA grant.

But significant losses of honey bee colonies from what is generally referred to as colony collapse disorder aren't going away. Over-winter colony losses have averaged about 30 percent for the last

eight years, and annual colony losses for the last two years have totaled about 50 percent, he said.

Nonetheless, the number of honey-producing colonies was up 100,000, NASS reported.

Beekeepers are managing for pollination income and are getting better at splitting colonies to replace lost colonies, Cox said.

Beekeepers traditionally only divided hives once a year — in the spring when bees naturally swarm and divide. Now, many are dividing as much as eight months out of the year, he said.

Honey production is sacrificed to make new hives, but more lost hives are being replaced and more sideline and backyard beekeepers are contributing to hive

numbers, he said.

Colony losses are still extremely high, however, with average annual losses in the 50 percent range and some as high as 70 percent to 90 percent, he said.

Cox lost 2,000 hives from the end of July to February but can live with that 30 percent loss since he now makes at least 2,500 new hives annually, he said.

Large, abnormal losses continue since USDA coined the term colony collapse disorder almost 10 years ago.

But "it's something we're learning to manage," he said.

Historically, winter kill was about 5 percent, compared with 20 percent to 35 percent now. Many beekeepers now winter bees in indoor facilities to improve survival rates, he said.

Anticipating losses and trying to meet their needs for pollination contracts, beekeepers are making more colonies in the summer. But replacing colonies is financially difficult, considering lost productivity, cost of queen bees and increased labor, van Engelsdorp said.

"We're not afraid bees will go extinct, but we're afraid commercial beekeepers will go out of business," he said.

They are losing colonies all the time and now making several splits," he said.

Three major components are at play in colony losses — the varroa mite, pesticides that beekeepers use as well as crop pesticides and loss of nutrition, particularly in the form of pasture in the Midwest that has been replaced by corn and soybeans, he said.

NW hop acreage continues to grow

Craft breweries drive growing demand; stocks down slightly

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

YAKIMA, Wash. — Pacific Northwest hop acreage likely will increase 13 percent this year, driven by continued growth of the craft brewery industry, a leading hop processor says.

Oil in the hop cone is used for flavoring and stabilizing beer.

The USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service will complete an acreage survey in June, but "it appears acreage will go up by 5,000 this year," said Pete Mahony, director of supply chain management and purchasing for John I. Haas in Yakima. The company is a leader in growing and processing hops, plus research and development.

NASS did release, on March 20, a report on hop stocks as of March 1. It showed the total amount of hops held by growers, dealers and brewers at 119 million pounds, down 2 percent from a year ago.

Of the total, brewers held 43 million pounds, down 12 percent from last year. Growers and dealers had 76 million pounds, up 6 percent.

"It looks like brewers are slower to draw inventory. They may want to let dealers carry costs of cold storage," Mahony said.

It could be that most of the



Photos by Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Vincente Pacheco sweeps hop cones from the floor as vines overhead are fed into a cone stripper at Roy Farms, Moxee, Wash., during harvest in September 2013.



A hop vine display is shown outside the John I. Haas hops research and development center in Yakima, Wash. Inventories are down a bit, demand remains strong and hop acreage is expected to keep increasing this year.

119 million pounds is sold and that the amount brewers hold versus the amount growers and dealers hold is a timing issue on shipments, he said.

Haas looks at the total stock number more than the split between dealers and brewers, and said a 2 percent drop is not all that significant, he said.

The 2014 crop was up 2.5

percent in production over 2013, a small increase hampered by a heatwave in July and August that slowed growth, Mahony said.

"Cone size and weight didn't develop," he said.

Washington produced 79 percent of the 2014 U.S. crop, Oregon produced 11 percent and Idaho 10 percent, NASS reported in December. Total



Hop cones in summer growth in Yakima, Wash.

acreage likely will surpass 40,000 this year with growth in all three states, but mostly in Idaho.

Demand by craft breweries remains strong and growers are receiving in the \$10,000 per acre range for higher-demand varieties, Mahony said.

The total U.S. crop was valued at \$272 million in December, NASS said. The average price per pound was \$3.83, up from \$3.35 the year before.

Onion thrips reproducing early

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

ONTARIO, Ore. — An Oregon State University scouting program has confirmed onion thrips — tiny, winged insects that spread iris yellow spot virus in onion fields — are reproducing in Western Idaho and Malheur County, Ore., nearly a month early.

OSU Extension onion specialist Stuart Reitz fears thrip pressure will be especially high this season, increasing rates of iris yellow spot in growers' fields.

Reitz began finding immature thrips on plants in mid-March — something that doesn't usually happen in the region until mid-April. Reitz's testing of volunteer onions hasn't confirmed any virus yet this season, but he's certain the disease, which causes yield losses and smaller onion size, will surface all too soon.

"This is the earliest I have seen reproducing thrips out in the field," Reitz said. "We had a really mild winter increase their survivorship, and we had enough warm weather back in early February that the thrips were able to start reproducing again."

The average February temperature throughout the area served by the National Weather Service's Boise office was a record 43.9 degrees, 7.4 degrees above normal. The previous February record high was set in 1934, according to David Decker, program leader with the NWS Boise office.

"We're also on pace to have the mildest winter in terms of average temperatures," Decker said. "This is going to be the mildest February and win-



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Oregon State University Extension onion researcher Stuart Reitz presents research data July 9 during a field day at OSU's Malheur County Experiment Station near Ontario.

ter for a lot of different sites around Idaho."

Reitz monitors onion thrip populations with yellow sticky cards placed around four fields in Malheur County and two fields in Western Idaho.

Reitz said growers can limit their risk of iris yellow spot by controlling volunteer onions and weeds that help the insects and virus overwinter. He said growers may also plant varieties that better resist the virus, though they're all susceptible to some degree, and implement thrip insecticide programs.

In OSU's 2014 research trials, Reitz said the most successful pesticide programs reduced thrip pressure by 65 percent and increased yields by 30-35 percent over untreated check plots. Treated plots also had larger-sized bulbs.

Reitz said onions infected with iris yellow spot also tend to rot at higher rates in storage.

Washington moves closer to growing hemp

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Washington lawmakers are moving closer

LEGAL NOTICE OF CLOVER COMMISSION PUBLIC BUDGET HEARING

TO: ALL OREGON CLOVER SEED GROWERS

Notice is hereby given that a public hearing will be held pursuant to ORS 576.416 (5), on Wednesday, May 13, 2015, at 7:00 a.m., at Jake's Deli, 1208 SE Baker Street, McMinnville, Oregon, upon a proposed budget for operation of the Clover Commission during the fiscal year July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2016. At this hearing any producer of Clover seed has a right to be heard with respect to the proposed budget, a copy of which is available for public inspection, under reasonable circumstances, in the office of each County Extension Agent in Oregon. For further information, contact the Clover Commission business office, P.O. Box 3366, Salem, Oregon 97302, telephone (503) 364-2944. The meeting location is accessible to persons with disabilities. Please make any requests for an interpreter for the hearing impaired or for other accommodation for persons with disabilities at least 48 hours before the meeting by contacting the Commission office at 503-364-2944.

to legalizing hemp cultivation, but while requiring growers to be licensed and pay fees.

The House Commerce and Labor Committee on Monday unanimously approved legislation to regulate hemp, a federally controlled substance.

The bipartisan vote reaffirmed the House's position that hemp needs more oversight than carrots and apples.

The Senate favored simply recognizing hemp as an agricultural crop and in January passed a three-page measure, Senate Bill 5012.

The full House has yet to vote on a hemp bill. The House commerce committee took the Senate's brief hemp bill and made it 23 pages.

LEGAL

The Oregon Processed Vegetable Commission will hold a public budget hearing on April 23, 2015, 7:30 p.m. at 1320 Capitol Street NE, Salem, Oregon. Any person wishing to comment on the budget is welcome to do so either orally or in writing. A copy of the proposed budget is available for public inspection during normal business hours at the commission office located at 6745 SW Hampton Street, Suite 101, Portland, Oregon.

Hemp advocates asked for the oversight. They said their new industry needs state-enforced rules to ensure seed purity and prevent cross-pollination with marijuana fields.

Without such safeguards, manufacturers of hemp products will shun Washington-grown hemp, Washington Hemp Industries Association President Joy Beckerman Maher said.

"It's very important we have at least minimal regulation, or we wouldn't even be able to compete. We'd be blacklisted," she said.

The prime sponsor of the Senate bill, Raymond Democrat Brian Hatfield, said he thinks hemp advocates aren't giving enough credit to current programs to certify seeds and prevent cross-pollination. Still, he said he wasn't "drawing a line in the sand."

"The bottom line is to say, 'It's legal,' however we get there," he said. "As long as folks can move forward, that's the most important thing."

Hemp growers would have to initially pay \$30 per acre to the Washington State Department of Agriculture. The fee would be

reset after the first growing season to fully fund WSDA's oversight of the hemp industry.

Hemp growers would be limited to planting certified seeds and would have to submit samples of their crop to be tested for Tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC, the psychoactive ingredient in marijuana.

An earlier House proposal set the fee at \$10 an acre. Commerce and Labor Committee Chairman Christopher Hurst, D-Enumclaw, said he didn't want budget writers to view the bill as setting up a new program that will need to be funded.

The fees won't stop hemp farming, Beckerman Maher said. "Investors aren't going to mind," she said.

The 2014 Farm Bill relaxed rules against hemp, opening the door for the state to approve cultivation and for universities to conduct research.

SB 5012 would require Washington State University to study the feasibility of growing and marketing hemp in the state. The research would be dependent on WSU acquiring federal or private funding.

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