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BEEKEEPERS

STRUGGLE TO KEEP AG BUZZING

Continued honeybee die-offs are caused by a combination of factors, researchers say

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

GOODING, Idaho — On a cool Idaho morning in late May, the bees are more active than Jed McGuire had expected. The fourth-generation beekeeper doesn't usually wear much in the way of protective gear to work his bees, but today he dons a hat and veil — and gloves, to protect an angry rash of poison ivy on his wrists.

He and his right-hand man in the family business, nephew Tyler Magnelli, are starting their annual ritual of placing bee boxes in one of the 30 bee yards McGuire rents around the Magic Valley in exchange for honey.

They've spent the last four weeks remaking their dead hives after winter losses, adding a new queen to each colony they've rebuilt with a lean supply of existing brood and bees. The brood includes eggs, larvae and pupae.

With smoke cans at the ready, they calmly open each box and meticulously inspect every tray to determine the health of the colony and the viability of the queen. The bees they are placing in a field outside Gooding will be used to pollinate onions grown for seed in Minidoka County.

The bees will be treated for pests and parasites if needed, given a pollen supplement and left to forage flowering plants nearby to nourish the hive. Corn syrup will also be provided in an open-feeding system to ensure the bees are getting the sustenance they need.

But not all of the colonies will be up to the task of pollinating onions about a month from now.

"We have to make sure they're big enough, have enough bees to go to the onions. We'll leave the smaller ones behind and nurse them up for winter," McGuire said.

Beekeeping these days demands a lot of "nursing up." McGuire and about 2,000 other commercial beekeepers in the U.S. have been fighting an ongoing battle to keep their colonies thriving for at least the last decade. A commercial beekeeper is classified as one with 300 or more colonies.

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Courtesy USDA

The U.S. Supreme Court Monday ruled unanimously that landowners can challenge a federal government determination that their property is subject to Clean Water Act restrictions.

Clean Water Act ruling improves government accountability, experts say

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Landowners can challenge a federal government determination that their property is subject to Clean Water Act restrictions, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously ruled May 31.

With federal officials facing a new source of lawsuits, they must now do a better job justifying their conclusions, legal experts say.

"The cavalier attitude toward asserting authority under the Clean Water Act we hope will change," said Reed Hopper, an attorney with the Pacific Legal Foundation, a public interest legal organization.

The nation's highest court rejected arguments by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers that its "jurisdictional determinations" can't be challenged in court because they're merely advisory opinions that property is subject to the Clean Water Act.

The ruling is a victory for farmers and other landowners who would rather sue to prove their property doesn't fall under the agency's jurisdiction than seek costly Clean Water Act permits or abandon their projects.

The federal government argued that landowners are free to ignore a jurisdictional determination and then fight the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency when defending against an enforcement action.

Chief Justice John Roberts, in his opinion for the court, dismissed the claim that landowners must expose themselves to sanctions to question the government's conclusions.

"Respondents need not assume such risks while waiting for EPA to 'drop the hammer' in order to have their day in court," Roberts said.

The practical effect is that federal agencies will need a solid scientific basis that private property has a "significant nexus" with waters protected by the Clean Water Act, said Hopper, who argued the Supreme Court case on behalf of the Hawkes Co., which was blocked from extracting peat moss from its wetlands.

"The Corps is going to have to get its ducks in a row. It's going to have to provide data to support its decision that this is a water of the U.S.," he said.

In the Hawkes case, the government required the company to obtain a Clean Water Act permit because the

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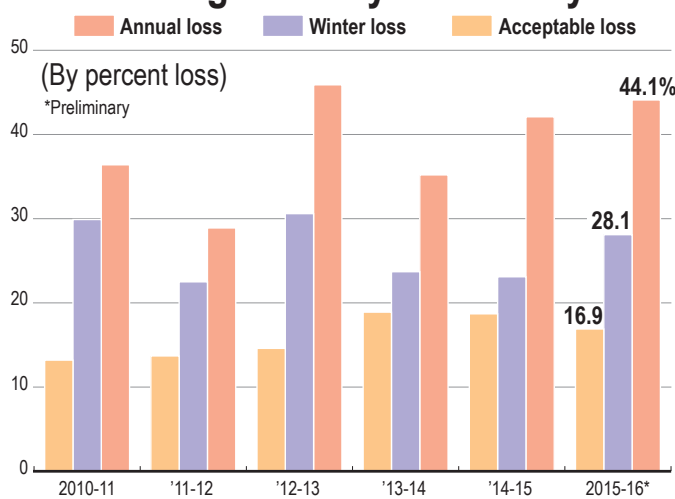


Photos by Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press

Commercial beekeeper Jed McGuire, right, talks with his nephew, Tyler Magnelli, during a break from inspecting their hives in a field near Gooding, Idaho, on May 24.

TOP PHOTO: McGuire inspects a frame in one of his beehives.

U.S. managed honey bee colony loss



14 stock dogs poisoned with strychnine

Gopher pellets mixed with raw ground meat

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

CANYON COUNTY, Idaho — Fourteen stock and guard dogs have been poisoned with strychnine in this part of southwestern Idaho since early April and 12 have died.

The poisoning of the dogs, which are used to guard and shepherd sheep and goats, has occurred over several weeks.

"We lost another dog today. The poisoning is still going on," the dogs' owner, Casey Echevarria, told Capital Press May 30.

The dogs were intentionally poisoned with strychnine, said Dr. Brent Varriale, a Fruitland veterinarian who examined

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Sean Ellis/Capital Press

An Anatolian shepherding dog, guard sheep in Southwestern Idaho May 16. Someone has poisoned 14 stock and guard dogs with strychnine in this area since early April.

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