



Priority Principles for the 2018 Farm Bill Conservation Title

May 22, 2017

Honey bees and other pollinators are a vital part of U.S. agriculture — supporting production of most of the fruits, nuts and vegetables grown in the U.S., with an approximate \$19 billion in agricultural production annually. Protection of honey bee health is a critical bipartisan issue requiring practical solutions that work across all of agriculture. The 2018 Farm Bill provides a vital mechanism to improve and enhance conservation programs to ensure that U.S. agricultural policy supports honey bees – and to ensure that honey bees can continue to support U.S. agriculture.

When we support and improve honey bee health and habitat, we ...

- protect our food supply
- support beekeepers, farmers and rural communities
- support soil health, water quality, crop production, pollinators, fish and wildlife habitat, recreation, and human health

As one of the largest and most diverse public-private partnerships working to address honey bee health across agriculture, the Honey Bee Health Coalition (www.honeybeehealthcoalition.org, facilitated by Keystone Policy Center) provides coordination and leadership to support our vision of *Healthy Bees, Healthy People, and a Healthy Planet*. The Coalition brings together more than 45 organizations representing beekeepers, specialty and row crop farmers, agribusinesses including seed and chemical companies, and conservation interests as well as *ex officio* public sector expertise. We work together on collaborative and voluntary strategies for honey bee health that make sense for beekeepers, farmers, the environment, and the agricultural supply chain.

The Coalition facilitated the development of the 2018 Farm Bill Conservation Title priority principles presented below, which represent the consensus of the diverse organizations and individuals listed on page 3. These priorities focus on the conservation title. We recognize that many other areas of the Farm Bill, including the commodities and research titles, address important priorities for honey bee health including emergency relief funding, honey quality, public lands access, and funding for essential research; we do not take a position on them here, but we encourage consideration of the beekeeping industry's input on these topics.

The Coalition welcomes the opportunity to work with lawmakers and other organizations interested in discussing and advancing these priorities.

We urge that the conservation title of the 2018 Farm Bill protect and enhance habitat for honey bees and other pollinators. Implementation of current Farm Bill pollinator habitat and forage programs has been varied and uneven at the state and local levels. The 2018 Farm Bill should provide national leadership in promoting pollinator habitat. It should specifically recognize and address the following priority principles both through Farm Bill legislation and accompanying report language:

1. **USDA conservation program lands are essential to honey bee health and their acreage should be increased.** The US Department of Agriculture's voluntary private land conservation programs, including the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), provide essential opportunities for establishing



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and maintaining honey bee forage in agricultural landscapes. CRP represents the single largest opportunity to provide high quality forage and habitat on agricultural landscapes for honey bees and other pollinators. Increases in conservation program acreage benefit pollinators as well as soil, water, and other wildlife. However, declines in total acreage of the CRP program over time have reduced potential pollinator forage and habitat. Demand from farmers for enrollment opportunities vastly exceeds eligible acreage and funding in critical bee forage areas.

2. **The pollinator value and cost-effectiveness of plantings should be maximized on USDA conservation program lands, including through improving pollinator-specific programs and enhancing other programs to include pollinator habitat.** The 2014 Farm Bill called for, “to the extent practicable, practices that maximize benefits for honey bees.” However, there is more work to be done to implement this directive at the agency and field levels. USDA conservation practices and program specifications should be evaluated and enhanced to ensure that pollinator-specific forage and habitat practices deliver high-quality nutrition through their seed mixes, seeding rates, and establishment and management practices. Seeding specifications should also allow the most cost-effective options for agricultural landowners to establish pollinator habitat. Non-pollinator specific conservation practices such as water quality, soil health and agroforestry practices should be evaluated and improved to enhance pollinator forage through stacking of multiple resource benefits. The Coalition has previously provided specific recommendations to USDA regarding improvements to seeding and technical specifications that would enhance the pollinator value and cost-effectiveness of conservation programs; these recommendations include:
 - a. limiting the percentage of grasses in seed mixes,
 - b. increasing the minimum numbers of pollinator-friendly species in a seed mix,
 - c. allowing a broader range of native and introduced species adapted to a geographic area,
 - d. increasing the allowed seeding rate for pollinator plantings,
 - e. and encouraging states to allow a broader range of establishment and mid-contract management options.

These recommendations should be reviewed and included as specific guidance to USDA as part of the congressional report accompanying the 2018 Farm Bill.

3. **Landowners and producers need flexibility to take management actions to benefit honey bees and other pollinators, including mid-contract management activities.** While national guidance is generally inclusive of a variety of mid-contract management practices, state specifications tend to unduly limit the available practices that promote the establishment of bee forage and pollinator habitat. National encouragement of practices that successfully produce pollinator forage and habitat results can have positive impacts for honey bees and other pollinators. Such practices can include, but not limited to, Prescribed Fire, Light Disking, Managed Grazing, Managed Haying, Herbicide Application, Inter-seeding and a combination of these techniques. Conservation programs could also offer additional program options, flexibilities, incentives and alternatives for pollinator habitat establishment beyond those offered in current CRP contracts.



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Signed by:

Keystone Policy Center (facilitator) on behalf of the following members of the Honey Bee Health Coalition:

Agricultural Retailers Association
Almond Alliance of California
American Beekeeping Federation
American Honey Producers Association
American Seed Trade Association
American Soybean Association
Apiary Inspectors of America
BASF
Bayer; Crop Science Division
Bee and Butterfly Habitat Fund
Browning's Honey Co., Inc.
CropLife America
Eastern Apiculture Society
Eastern Missouri Beekeepers Association
Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association
Foundation for the Preservation of Honey Bees
National Association of Wheat Growers
National Corn Growers Association
Pheasants Forever, Inc.
Pollinator Stewardship Council
Project Apis m.
Quail Forever
Saint Louis Zoo
US Canola Association
Valent U.S.A. LLC