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OREGONIANS FOR FOOD & SHELTER

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A non-profit coalition to promote the efficient production of quality food and fiber while protecting human health, personal property and the environment, through the integrated, responsible use of pest management products, soil nutrients and biotechnology.

HB 3360 – Relating to the OSU Honey Bee Lab

HB 3361 – Relating to pollinator health

HB 3362 – Relating to pollinator health

10 June 2015

Testimony to the Ways & Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

Honorable Committee Members:

Oregonians for Food & Shelter (OFS) is a grassroots coalition of farmers, foresters, and other technology users focused on natural resource issues involving pesticides, fertilizer, and biotechnology. We are writing you today in support of House Bills 3360, 3361 and 3362. We thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on this important issue.

Concerns around pesticide use and potential effects on bees are very important to all pesticide users, but especially to those involved in agriculture. Oregon farmers depend on bees to pollinate many of their crops, but also depend on pesticide tools to control destructive pests. Similarly, commercial beekeepers rely on healthy crops to optimize their pollination services. This means that Oregon growers and beekeepers have a lot at stake in this conversation and each share a vested interest in ensuring that protecting bee health, and the use of pesticides, are not mutually exclusive. Bee health is important to all of us and nobody wants to see adverse incidents that add to bee population declines.

While we can understand the concerns of beekeepers, and the public at large, the issue of declining bee populations unfortunately has no simple answer. In fact, research on Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) has highlighted a complex interaction of factors that play a role in bee health and found no singular cause of the problem.

Since reports of significant losses to bee colonies were publicized in 2006, researchers and regulators have been looking for answers to what may be the cause. A CCD Steering Committee was formed at the national level to address the concerns over bee losses. Several individuals from the Steering Committee along with Pennsylvania State University met in October 2012 for a National Stakeholders Conference on Honey Bee Health to discuss future actions to promote health and mitigate risks to managed honeybees in the U.S. In May of 2013 the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and EPA released a comprehensive scientific report on honeybee health. The report concludes that there are multiple factors that play a role in honeybee colony declines. Findings from the report include:

- Recognizes the Varroa mite as the *“single most detrimental pest of honey bees and is closely associated with overwintering colony decline”*
- Notes multiple diseases associated with CCD, many of which are amplified by the Varroa mite.
- Urges adoption of Best Management Practices (BMPs) to enhance bee health.
- Recognizes the need to significantly improve genetic diversity in U.S. bee populations.

- Recommends increased nutritional options (forage) to lessen susceptibility to stressors.
- Recommends continued research on pesticide impacts at field-relevant exposures.
- Calls for greater collaboration and information sharing among stakeholders to facilitate adoption of BMPs that are critical to improving bee health.

Recognizing this reality, Oregon took a proactive step to address pollinator health. In the 2014 legislative session, OFS supported House Bill 4139, which established a Pollinator Task Force that was tasked with finding collaborative solutions to pollinator concerns. The diverse 10-member board, which OFS served on, met seven times in 2014 and released their final report with priority recommendations. The four priority recommendations were:

- Oregon should develop a strong, effective outreach and education strategy on pollinator health, including best management practices.
- Oregon should fully fund a state-of-the-art bee health diagnostic facility at Oregon State University.
- An integrated pollinator health research plan should be developed and funded to improve understanding of the many issues affecting pollinator health.
- A sustainable revenue stream to fund the proposed outreach, education and research programs is needed.

This diverse group of stakeholders agreed that the best way to move forward was not with more regulation of pesticides, but with collaborative approaches to education, outreach and research. House Bills 3360, 3361 and 3362 reflect these recommendations.

OFS supports all three bills.

HB 3360 would increase capacity at the Oregon State University bee lab to ensure they can properly study and diagnose bee health issues. This will allow us to focus future resources on specific problems that are identified.

HB 3361 dedicates money to Oregon State University Extension to work with the Oregon Department of Agriculture to develop and distribute best management practices to improve pollinator health.

HB 3362 would raise pesticide registration fees to fund education and outreach to pesticide users about the best practices for avoiding adverse effects from pesticides on populations of bees.

Thank you for your consideration and we encourage you to support this package of bills.

Sincerely,



Scott J. Dahlman
Policy Director