

Amanda Brazee

From: Mark Johnson
Sent: Thursday, November 20, 2014 5:00 PM
To: Amanda Brazee
Subject: article for Council
Attachments: Bee Habitat Funding.pdf

Dear Council members:

The attached article came across my desk and I thought you may find it interesting as well.

Have a great day,

Mark

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REGIONAL NEWS

NRCS increases funding for bee habitats

■ Applications
due Nov. 21

By **Mikkel Pates**
Agweek Staff Writer

FARGO, N.D. — The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service will deliver \$4 million for honeybee habitat funding through its Environmental Quality Incentive Program in fiscal year 2015.

The \$4 million is up 25 percent from \$3.2 million spent in 2014 fiscal year, an NRCS spokesman says. Last year, the amount covered about two-thirds of the requests.

The deadline for applying for this year's EQIP funding is Nov. 21. U.S. Sens. John Hoeven, R-N.D., and Heidi Heitkamp, D-N.D., both announced their support of the spending, to help offset effects of colony collapse disorder, which causes 30 to 90 percent of bee die-offs. Bees pollinate \$15 billion in crops across the country.

Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack says the expenditure is designed to improve the health of honeybee populations.

"Significant progress has been made in understanding the factors that are associated with colony collapse disorder and the overall health of honeybees, and this funding will allow us to work with farmers and ranchers to apply that knowledge over a broader area," Vilsack says.

The amount contributes to a June 2014 Presidential Memorandum — Creating a Federal Strategy to Promote the Health of Honey Bees and Other Pollinators — which directs USDA to expand acreage and forage value in its conservation programs.

Of the amount delivered last year, preliminary data shows about \$907,000 went to South Dakota, \$840,000 to North Dakota, \$680,000 to Wisconsin, \$628,000 to Minnesota, and \$190,000 to Michigan.

The \$3.2 million spent last year allowed the agency to deliver 220 contracts, putting practices on a total of 26,000 acres across the five states.

Jennifer Wurtz, NRCS manager



Mikkel Pates, Agweek

for the EQIP program in South Dakota, says the state has 14,771 acres in the program with 35 contracts last year, for an average of about 422 acres per contract. Some contracts in the western part of the state were larger, as much as about 2,000 acres.

The main practices paid for in 2014 in South Dakota were vegetative.

"We did a lot of native pollinator grass seedings," Wurtz says. There was also a lot of interest in season-long cover crops that are planted on cropland to provide forage for the honeybee through an entire growing season.

"In this particular case, to be eligible, you need to plant at least 75 percent of the mix that would provide honeybee forages," she

◀ The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service announced it will help boost honeybee habitats in five states.

says. "Some native species and introduced species are more commonly used — alfalfa and several kinds of clover."

In some cases, the farmer could be paid \$14 to \$15 an acre to monitor land for honeybee activity, to record activity of the bees, and the producer could use the information to adjust agronomic activity to avoid hurting bees. The NRCS worked with the Xerces Society, a bee pollinator group, to provide web-based training protocols for the monitoring. The South Dakota NRCS implemented an \$11,200 per year cap on what an individual could get for monitoring bee activity.

The EQIP program allows only three years of payments for an individual management practice, Wurtz says, with the idea it goes on beyond that without compensation because it shows a benefit.