

Preliminary Results: A Survey of Honey Bee Colonies Losses in the U.S. Between September 2008 and April 2009.

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Note: A more detailed final report is being prepared for publication at a later date.

The Apiary Inspectors of America (AIA) and USDA-ARS Beltsville Honey Bee Lab conducted a survey between September 2008 and early April 2009 to estimate colony losses across the country. Over 20% of the country's estimated 2.3 million colonies were surveyed. A total loss of 28.6% of managed honey bee colonies was recorded. This compares to losses of 35.8% and 31.8% recorded respectively in the winters of 2007/2008 and 2006/2007. While a decrease in total losses is encouraging, the rate of loss remains unsustainable as the average operational loss increased from 31% in 2007/2008 to 34.2% in the 2008/2009 winter.

Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) is characterized by the complete absence of bees in dead colonies or in apiaries. This survey was not able to differentiate between verifiable cases of CCD and colonies lost as the result of other causes that share the "absence of dead bees" as a symptom. The 26% of operations that reported some of their colonies died without dead bees lost 32% of their colonies, while beekeepers that did not lose any bees with symptoms of CCD lost a total of 26% of their colonies.

Only 15% of all the colonies lost during the 2008/2009 winter died with symptoms of CCD, this compares to a 60% colony loss with CCD-like symptoms in the winter of 2007/2008. While losses from CCD may have decreased in the winter of 2008/2009, losses from other causes remain a significant concern. 58% of all beekeepers reported above normal losses last year, losing a total of 32.8% of their colonies compared to the minority of beekeepers who claimed a normal or below normal loss of 17%.

These findings emphasize the urgent need for research, not only of CCD, but of general honey bee health.

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