
The Bee Line

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Pollination Survey

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In 1985 sales of agriculture commodities contributed 1.8 billion dollars to Oregon's economy. For many years the Extension Service has tracked the production and sales of nearly all crops grown in the state. Many of these commodities require or greatly benefit from honey bee pollination, yet we have little to no information concerning pollination rental fees. To correct this, we have recently conducted a pollination survey for 1986. What follows are some of the initial findings.

In 1986 over 2,400 beekeepers were registered with the Oregon Department of Agriculture's Commodity Inspection Division. As with beekeeping in most states, full time and semi-commercial beekeepers make up a small proportion of the total beekeeping population, but own the majority of colonies. For statistical, as well as practical purposes, a commercial beekeeper is defined as an individual owning more than 300 colonies. In Oregon, 48 persons are classified as commercial.

Semi-commercial beekeepers are divided into two groups based on number of colonies; 50 to 100 colonies, with 56 registered beekeepers, and 100 to 300 colonies with 57 registered beekeepers. It is primarily this group of 161 individuals that provides the commercial pollination service to Oregon's agricultural sector.

A summary of the crops pollinated, number of colonies involved, and average rental fees are given in Table 1. Please note that this is not a complete picture of commercial pollination within the state. It presents a statistical picture for only those professional beekeepers who took the time to respond to the survey, which was 27%, (43 out of 161). These 43 individuals collectively own 13,620 colonies, or approximately 20% of all colonies registered in Oregon in 1986.

Commercial beekeepers in the Pacific Northwest are economically dependent upon pollination rental fees. This income provides the stable financial base for their operations. In the past we have had few data that illustrate just how important pollination rental income is to a commercial operator. Therefore the survey included the question: "What percentage of your gross income results from pollination rental?" The answers allowed us to provide an average figure for both the full-time and semi-commercial beekeepers.

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Commercial Pollination Survey

Oregon - 1986

Crop	# of beekprs. responding	# of colonies rented	Total rental fee -\$	Ave. fee per colony	high fee/low fee
Vegetable seed	28	4479	103,446	23.10	26/0
Sweet Cherries	24	5308	97,825	18.40	22/14
Pears	24	4814	91,215	18.95	22/0
Red Clover Seed	19	3168	50,863	16.05	21/0
White Clover Seed	8	1299	23,988	18.50	25/15
Berries ¹	30	2285	21,714	9.50	15/0
Apples	11	948	18,655	19.70	21/12
Cucumbers	8	438	8,914	20.35	25/15
Blueberries	9	530	7,210	13.60	18/0
Radish Seed	7	514	7,150	13.90	24/0
Squash & Pumpkins	8	363	6,673	18.40	25/17
Crimson Clover Seed	17	3796	-0-	-0-	-0-
Hairy Vetch Seed	6	1538	-0-	-0-	-0-
Misc. ²	15	1336	16,667	12.50	
		<u>30,816</u>	<u>454,470</u>	<u>14.75</u>	

¹ Includes blackberries, raspberries, Boysen- & Marion berries.

² Includes buckwheat, holly, rape seed, meadowfoam, arrowleaf clover seed & watermelon.

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Percentage of Gross Income
from Pollination Rentals

Commercial

(owning more than 300 hives) 54%

Semi-Commercial

(over 50, under 300 hives) 51%

Interestingly, there is no statistically significant difference between the commercial and semi-commercial operator as regards the proportion of gross income generated by colony rentals.

A few observations concerning Table 1 are in order. The last column, high fee/low fee, is very interesting. Unfortunately, for too many crops, it shows that some beekeepers undervalue the pollinating benefits of their colonies. Two crops, crimson clover and hairy vetch, are viewed by beekeepers as surplus honey producers and no pollination fees are charged. The growers of these two seed crops are receiving the necessary pollination for free. The average berry pollination rental, \$9.50, also reflects a serious under evaluation of the pollination activities given to the growers.

It is hoped that this information will be of value and used by Oregon beekeepers when considering pollination activities. We intend to conduct a similar survey annually and indeed hope that more beekeepers will choose to participate.