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Bees' decline could lead to higher food prices

- STORY HIGHLIGHTS**
- Farmers say decline of honeybees could lead to higher food prices
 - Bee pollination is responsible for \$15 billion annually in crop value
 - Lack of bees may force elimination of certain Haagen-Dazs ice cream flavors

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WASHINGTON (AP) -- Food prices could rise even more unless the mysterious decline in honey bees is solved, farmers and businessmen told lawmakers Thursday.



AP PHOTO
Farmers say their businesses are feeling the sting of the decline of honey bees.

"No bees, no crops," North Carolina grower Robert D. Edwards told a House Agriculture subcommittee. Edwards said he had to cut his cucumber acreage in half because of the lack of bees available to rent.

About three-quarters of flowering plants rely on birds, bees and other pollinators to help them reproduce. Bee pollination is responsible for \$15 billion annually in crop value.

In 2006, beekeepers began reporting losing 30 percent to 90 percent of their hives. This phenomenon has become known as Colony Collapse Disorder. Scientists do not know how many bees have died; beekeepers have lost 36 percent of their managed colonies this year. It was 31 percent for 2007, said Edward B. Knipping, administrator of the Agriculture Department's Agricultural Research Service.

"If there are no bees, there is no way for our nation's farmers to continue to grow the high quality, nutritious foods our country relies on," said Democratic Rep. Dennis Cardoza of California, chairman of the horticulture and organic agriculture panel. "This is a crisis we cannot afford to ignore."

Food prices have gone up 83 percent in three years, according to the World Bank.

Edward R. Flanagan, who raises blueberries in Milbridge, Maine, said he could be forced to increase prices tenfold or go out of business without the beekeeping industry. "Every one of those berries owes its existence to the crazy, neurotic dancing of a honey bee from flower to flower," he said.

The cause behind the disorder remains unknown. Possible explanations include pesticides; a new parasite or pathogen; and the combination of immune-suppressing stresses such as poor nutrition, limited or contaminated water supplies and the need to move bees long distances for pollination.

Ice cream maker [Haagen-Dazs](#) and natural personal care products company Burt's Bees have pledged money for research and begun efforts to help save the bees.

The problem affects about 40 percent of Haagen-Dazs' 73 flavors, including banana split and chocolate peanut butter, because ingredients such as almonds, cherries and strawberries rely on honey bees for pollination.

Katty Pien, brand director for Haagen-Dazs, said those ingredients could become too scarce or expensive if bees keep dying. It could force the company to discontinue some of its most popular flavors, Pien said.

Haagen-Dazs has developed a new limited-time flavor, vanilla honey bee, and will use some of the proceeds for research on the disorder. Burt's Bees has introduced Colony Collapse Disorder Lip Balm to "soften your lips while saving honeybees."

The House Appropriations Committee approved \$780,000 on Thursday for research on the disorder and \$10 million for bee research. The money awaits approval by the full House and Senate.

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