



# AgBrief

## Apiary Inspection Program

Plant Protection & Weed Management Section

**H**oney bees are critically important to the agriculture industry, pollinating crops valued at more than \$40 million in Maryland alone. The Maryland Department of Agriculture Apiary Program works with both professional and amateur beekeepers to help keep bees and hives healthy and thriving. (Apiaries are sites where bees are kept.)

Beekeeping is a complicated endeavor that requires successful management of myriad factors, from diseases and pests to weather to destructive human activities. Managing these hives is also becoming extremely important since most wild honey bees have died due to parasitic mites.

### Colony Registration

To help maintain honey bee health, Maryland law requires everyone who keeps bees to register their colonies with MDA within 30 days of obtaining a honey bee colony and then annually thereafter. As of December 2015, there are 1,895 registered beekeepers who have 14,594 colonies at 2,469 locations. There is no fee to register a hive. For a registration form, see: [http://mda.maryland.gov/plants-pests/Pages/apiary\\_inspection.aspx](http://mda.maryland.gov/plants-pests/Pages/apiary_inspection.aspx)

**The MDA Apiary Program provides five primary services to help keep honey bees healthy and productive for Maryland agriculture.** The program:

- 1. Provides Technical Assistance.** The department's apiary inspectors work one-on-one with both professional and amateur beekeepers to provide them with the often complicated information they need to maintain healthy hives. Inspectors visit about two-thirds of all apiaries each year and examine colonies for disease and pests.
- 2. Conducts Incident Investigations.** The department will investigate any unexplained bee deaths or colony decline upon the request of the beekeeper, professional or amateur. There is no charge for this service to the beekeeper.
- 3. Inspects for Bee Diseases.** Apiary inspectors inspect and survey various habitats to identify diseases, parasitic mites and other pests that can damage or even destroy bee colonies. This includes inspections to detect American



Photo by USDA-ARS

### Did You Know?

The honey bee is not native to North America and is actually considered an exotic species, even though we're glad it's here.

- 4. Issues Permits.** To maintain honey bee health, the department approves the movement of honey bee colonies moving in and out of the state. During FY 2015, the department issued 3,684 permits for honey bee colonies to move into Maryland, primarily for overwintering. Another 2,500 colonies were transported out of Maryland. About 1,500 went to California during the winter to help with almond pollination. The frequent movement of bee colonies for pollination services adds considerable stress to the hive and can be a factor in seemingly unexplained hive loss.
- 5. Provides information to promote the beekeeping industry.** Apiary inspectors work with beekeeping clubs statewide to promote the hobby and assist in educating their members and the community about bee culture.



**Africanized Honey Bees** are the aggressive swarms of bees that most people see in movies and pose a potential threat to humans and livestock. These swarms have occasionally arrived in Maryland on cargo ships from Central and South America. The department sets traps and monitors for these bees at marine terminals and other shipping locations around the state every year.

**National Honey Bee Survey:** Maryland participated in the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service’s National Honey Bee Survey, which is designed to document which bee diseases, parasites, and pests are present. The department surveyed 24 apiaries in 2013 and 25 apiaries the year before.

**Did You Know?**

To date, Maryland has never had a documented case of Colony Collapse Disorder.

**A Note About Declining Honey Bee Health Nationwide**

The United States had as many as 6 million colonies in 1947. Today, there are about 2.5 million colonies nationwide. For the last five years, honey bee colonies have been dying at a rate of about 30 percent per year. Research on overall honey bee health is done at the federal level by several agencies, including the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This research has been unable to identify a single cause for poor colony health, but consensus is building among scientists that a complex set of stressors and pathogens can result in colony losses. These factors include honey bee disease, pests, poor nutrition, pesticide exposure, and beekeeping management practices. For a comprehensive discussion on the state of the research into these complex factors, see, *Report on the National Stakeholders Conference on Honey Bee Health, National Honey Bee Health Stakeholder Conference Steering Committee* (Oct. 2012) at <http://www.usda.gov/documents/ReportHoneyBeeHealth.pdf>



**Other Resources**

- **MDA Website**  
[http://mda.maryland.gov/plants-pests/Pages/apiary\\_inspection.aspx](http://mda.maryland.gov/plants-pests/Pages/apiary_inspection.aspx)
- **Maryland State Beekeeping Regulations**  
<http://www.dsd.state.md.us/comar/SubtitleSearch.aspx?search=15.07.01.%2a>
- **The Maryland Beekeepers Association**  
<http://www.mdbeekeepers.org/>

**Did You Know?**

In the late 1970s, Maryland became the first state to use dogs to detect disease in honey bee colonies, and it is the only state to keep a full-time “bee dog” on its staff. Mack is our fifth bee dog.



**Did You Know?**

During the summer, a typical honey bee colony contains 30,000 to 60,000 bees.



**Maryland Department of Agriculture**  
50 Harry S. Truman Parkway  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
[www.mda.maryland.gov](http://www.mda.maryland.gov)  
[mda.news@maryland.gov](mailto:mda.news@maryland.gov)

Governor Larry Hogan  
Lt. Governor Boyd K. Rutherford  
Secretary Joseph Bartenfelder  
Deputy Secretary James P. Eichhorst