

## Pacific Northwest Honey Bee Pollination Survey – 2005, Continued

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pollination income of 46 million dollars for PNW commercial beekeepers. Another way to look at this is how much pollination income should be produced from one commercial honey bee colony in one year? That figure is approximately \$230.

Comparing the hypothetical PNW rental income (36 million \$) to the farm-gate value of the crops pollinated in the PNW (1.75 billion \$) shows that the money spent by growers to insure adequate pollination is 2% of the value of total crop production. This is another impressive illustration of what a remarkable value pollination rental is to the commercial agricultural industry of the PNW.

**This year's survey provides data that continue to show a number of trends, one of which is the dependence of PNW commercial beekeepers on the income generated from colony rentals. For 2005 the average commercial beekeeper reported receiving 70% of his or her annual operating gross from pollination rentals. This percentage is higher than previous years. This increase is largely due to the very dramatic increase in the almond pollination rental fee for the 2005 pollinating season. In 2005 almond growers responded to a potential shortage of colonies by dramatically increasing the price they paid for pollination. Many commercial beekeepers in the PNW and elsewhere, observed serious autumn and early winter colony losses in 2004. This created a situation where a potential colony shortage was perceived by both beekeepers and almond growers for a crop with more than 550,000 bearing acres. The average almond pollination fee for 2005 was \$79<sup>40</sup>! This is a 63% increase from the 2004 average (\$48<sup>70</sup>).**

For 2005 the average pollination rental fee, computed from commercial colony rentals on all crops reported (including almonds), was \$51<sup>30</sup>. This is an increase of almost 33% above the average pollination fee of 2004 (\$38<sup>65</sup>) (see Tables 1 and 2). This dramatic escalation is due to the large increase in the average almond pollination rental fee but most crops pollinated within the PNW also experienced rental fee increases. With the exception of cucumbers, all reported crops saw significant increases in the average pollination fee received in 2005 compared to 2004 rental prices (see Table 2). Excluding almonds, the average rental increase for PNW crops in 2005 was 23.7%. The average increase for PNW tree fruit pollination was 21.7%. Was this a "shirt-tail" effect from the dramatic almond increase? At this time it is difficult to say, but should these prices remain stable or even increase in future pollination seasons, it would be safe to say that almond pollination fees have indeed influenced a price increase for the majority of PNW crops.

For a commercial beekeeper the gross amount of income generated from pollination rental leveled off in 1997 and 1998, but increased in 1999 (\$183,780). For 2005 this figure was calculated to be \$231,865. The increase results from a trend of increasing the size of individual operations and an increase in per colony pollination income. During the past ten years the average rental fee has increased from \$29<sup>60</sup> (1995) to \$51<sup>30</sup> (2005). It needs to be stressed that honey bee colony rental has for many decades been an underpaid service to the agricultural industry. It is really only within the past ten years that rental fees have begun to more accurately reflect the enormous value-added service of managed pollination. This is shown by the 180% increase in the average pollination fee during the last sixteen years; 1990 = \$18<sup>40</sup> to 2005 = \$51<sup>30</sup>.

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