UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Farm Service Agency
Washington, DC 20250

Notice CRP-775

For: MI, MN, ND, SD, and WI State and County Offices

CRP Honey Bee Initiative

Approved by: Deputy Administrator, Farm Programs

1 Overview

A Background

On June 20, 2014, in response to the Administration's directive to Federal Agencies to take additional steps to protect and restore domestic populations of pollinators, including honey bees, USDA announced $8 million in financial incentives for Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin farmers and ranchers who establish new habitats for declining honey bee populations on existing CRP grasslands. More than half of the commercially managed honey bees, vital to U.S. agriculture, are in these 5 States during the summer. Honey bee populations continue to struggle with various threats including habitat fragmentation, inadequate nutritious forage, pesticides, parasites, and diseases. Incentives provided through USDA conservation programs provide an opportunity to improve honey bee and other pollinator nutrition while creating or enhancing habitat. Existing CRP conservation covers can be improved through mid-contract management activities consistent with conservation plans, amended as appropriate, to benefit honey bees and other pollinators.

More than 30 percent of our nation's agricultural production depends on insect pollination. More than $15 billion worth of agricultural production, including over 130 fruits and vegetables, depend on the health and well-being of honey bees. This is especially true for certain commodities produced throughout the Upper Midwest.

Disposal Date	**Distribution**
January 1, 2015	Above State Offices; State Offices relay to County Offices and NRCS State Offices

1 Overview (Continued)

B Purpose

This notice provides:

- State FSA Offices in Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin authority to develop mid-contract management activities consistent with 2-CRP, subparagraph 428 C, designed to increase flowering plant diversity to benefit honey bees and other pollinators

- policy about an incentive in addition to cost-share to encourage producers to implement pollinator friendly mid-contract management activity

- a list of nationally approved species for planting.

C Objectives

The new CRP Honey Bee Initiative is designed to further enhance current CRP land by providing nutritious pollinator forage. Current CRP management activities are expanded to allow for replacing certain existing CRP conservation covers with lower cost, high-nutrition seed mixes that can support distinct blooming cycles of plants that benefit pollinators. Honey bees, the pollinator workhorse of fruit and vegetable agriculture, will have more blooms from which to collect nectar and pollen to sustain and promote colony growth and honey production throughout the growing season. The emphasis of this initiative is on identifying high quality honey bee forage species that can be successfully incorporated into existing CRP landscapes.

D Eligibility

This effort is focused on enhancing honey bee habitat conditions associated with grasslands currently under CRP contract and established to CP1, CP2, CP4D, CP10, CP25, and CP38E conservation cover practices across Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

Note: Honey bee habitat enhancement is a management activity and should **not** be considered a CP42 practice.

Establishing honey bee habitat in block plantings on existing CRP fields, currently dominated by grass monocultures lacking plant diversity and year-round flowering capability, is authorized. Participants are encouraged to establish honey bee habitat in a single block with at least 1 block of honey bee habitat per CRP field established. Individual block plantings **must** be at least 1 acre in size to provide suitable honey bee habitat and to reduce grass competition from the surrounding CRP field.

2 Policy

A Seed Mixes

STC's, in consultation with the State Technical Committee, shall establish seed mixes with preference given to native species and/or introduced, non-invasive species (such as alfalfa) providing honey bee habitat benefits. Seed mixes selected should be based on commercial availability, reasonable ease of establishment, moderate cost, nutritional and habitat value for honey bees relative to establishment costs, site conditions, and landowner objectives. Priority is placed on establishing perennial species, though annuals are an appropriate component of the seed mix provided that the annuals comprise a minority portion of the seed mix and that the annual species included in the mix are compatible with and will **not** out-compete the perennial species included in the seed mix once established. Exhibit 1 provides a list of nationally approved species. Other seeding mix considerations include:

- that trees and shrubs should **not** be included in the species mix
- that a minimum of 3 species, and up to a maximum of 8 species, of honey bee-friendly grasses and flowering plants, including wildflowers and legumes, be established

  Note: The 3 species need **not** be in bloom for the entirety of a bloom period.

- at least 1 species of the mix shall have their primary onset of blooming during each period of April 1 through June 15, June 16 through July 31, and August 1 through October 31
- seeding mixes shall include no more than 25 percent grasses based on pure live seeds per square foot
- where allowed by the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG), total seed mixes, including grass seeds, **must** be 15-30 pure live seeds per square foot.

  Note: Seeding rates may be higher depending on local variability and where required by NRCS FOTG and approved by STC.

B Establishment

CRP participants may use cover crops, herbicides, and other means, as outlined in the approved conservation plan and according to 2-CRP, paragraph 426, to establish honey bee habitat. Authority provided includes consideration of potential herbicide applications in the fall, spring, and following fall to control existing grass competition, and no-till planting of site appropriate, perennial grass and forb seed mixes to benefit honey bees and other pollinators, and residue removal by bailing, burning, or grazing. Producer out-of-pocket costs to implement honey bee habitat enhancement are estimated to exceed $200 per acre on average. CRP mid-contract management activity cost-share limits are applicable to honey bee habitat establishment.

2 Policy (Continued)

C Mid-Contract Management

After the honey bee habitat is created, additional management activity should follow at appropriate intervals according to the conservation plan during the life of CRP-1 to maintain or enhance flowering plant diversity and set back vegetative succession and woody encroachment. Subsequent mid-contract management of the land enrolled in CRP **must** consider retaining or enhancing the original cover established plus the honey bee habitat created. Management activities may be authorized during the blooming periods, but outside the primary nesting season, if the management activity promotes plant diversity and enhances honey bee habitat. Appropriate management activities include light disking, prescribed burning, selective herbicide application, or treatments approved by STC. Mowing is generally an inadequate means of disturbance for honey bee habitat, except as needed to remove annual weeds during establishment, or to facilitate prescribed burning or light disking.

D Cost-Share for Mid Contract Management Activity

Honey bee habitat enhancement is an authorized mid-contract management activity. 2-CRP, paragraph 428 and Exhibit 11 provide that certain management activities are required for all practices. These management activities associated with honey bee habitat establishment are eligible for cost-share. The CRP Honey Bee Initiative cost-share per acre may exceed $50 per acre per year provided the producer has sufficient out-of-pocket, mid-contract management activity costs to justify reimbursement, **not** to exceed the following limits:

- $100 per acre for the life of the contract for a 10-year contract
- $125 per acre for the life of the contract for a contract in excess of 10 years.

E Incentives

A total of $8 million has been made available as additional incentives to support honey bee habitat enhancement.

An initial allocation by State will be made by DAFP as necessary to ensure maximum enrollment. A 1-time signing incentive payment, called a Honey Bee Incentive Payment (BIP), of $120 per acre is authorized when the enhancement for honey bee habitat is modified on the conservation plans and approved by COC. COC shall **not** approve modified conservation plans to include honey bee habitat enhancement before October 1, 2014.

Note: BIP shall be included within, and considered a component of, the CRP $50,000 annual payment limitation.

2 Policy (Continued)

F Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing

2-CRP, paragraphs 663 and 716 provide guidance on managed harvesting and routine grazing authorities. Managed grazing under older CRP contracts **must** be performed in a manner consistent with the provisions of 2-CRP, paragraph 679.

G Technical Responsibility

Technical responsibility shall be assigned to NRCS or TSP.

H Automation

Automation procedure will be provided at a later date. Until available, State and County Offices shall follow policy outlined in this notice.

I Contact Information

For questions about the CRP Honey Bee Initiative, contact David Hoge by either of the following:

- e-mail to **david.hoge@wdc.usda.gov**
- telephone at 202-720-7674.

3 Action

A State Office Action

State Offices shall:

- provide a copy of this notice to the NRCS State Office
- ensure that County Offices follow the provisions of this notice.

B County Office Action

County Offices shall:

- provide a copy of this notice to NRCS
- ensure that policy in this notice is followed.

Approved Species List for Plantings Under CRP Honey Bee Initiative

The following approved species have priority placed on establishing perennials.

Common Name	Species Name	Native Status	Wetland Status	State Occurrence
Early-Season Species				
Ground Plum	*Astragalus crassicarpus*	native	UPL	MN, ND, SD
Smooth Penstemon	*Penstemon digitalis*	native	FAC/UPL	MI, WI
Large Flowered Penstemon	*Penstemon grandiflorus*	native	UPL	MI, WI, MN, ND, SD
Alsike Clover	*Trifolium hybridum* **1/**	introduced	FACU	MI, WI, MN, ND, SD
Red Clover	*Trifolium pretense* **1/**	introduced	FACU	MI, WI, MN, ND, SD
White Clover	*Trifolium repens* **1/**	introduced	FACU	MI, WI, MN, ND, SD
American Vetch	*Vicia Americana* **1/**	native	FACU	MI, WI, MN, ND, SD
Mid-Season Species				
Giant Blue Hyssop	*Agastache foeniculum*	native	FAC	WI, MN, ND, SD
Purple Giant Hyssop	*Agastache scrophulariaefolia*	native	FAC	MI, WI, MN
Showy Milkweed	*Asclepias speciosa* **2/**	native	FAC	MN, ND, SD
Common Milkweed	*Asclepias syriaca* **2/**	native	UPL	MI, WI, MN, ND, SD
Swamp Milkweed	*Asclepias incarnate* **2/**	native	OBL	MI, WI, MN, ND, SD
Butterfly Milkweed	*Asclepias tuberosa* **2/**	native	UPL	MI, WI, MN
Canada Milkvetch	*Astragalus canadensis*	native	FAC/UPL	MI, WI, MN, ND, SD
Rocky Mountain Bee Plant	*Cleome serrulata*	native	UPL	ND, SD
White Prairie Clover	*Dalea candida*	native	UPL	WI, MN, ND, SD
Purple Prairie Clover	*Dalea purpurea*	native	UPL	WI, MN, ND, SD
Blanketflower	*Gaillardia aristata*	native	UPL	ND, SD
Alfalfa	*Medicago sativa*	introduced	UPL	MI, WI, MN, ND, SD
Yellow Alfalfa	*Medicago sativa ssp. falcata*	introduced	UPL	MI, WI, MN, ND, SD
Spotted Bee Balm	*Monarda punctata*	native	UPL	MI, WI, MN
Sainfoin	*Ononbrychis viciaefolia*	introduced	UPL	ND, SD
Slender Mountain Mint	*Pycnanthemum tenuifolium*	native	FAC	MI, WI, MN
Virginia Mountain Mint	*Pycnanthemum virginianum*	native	FAC	MI, WI, MN, ND, SD
Late-Season Species				
Sneezeweed	*Helenium autumnale*	native	OBL	MI, WI, MN, ND, SD
Sawtooth Sunflower	*Helianthus grosseserratus*	native	FAC	MI, WI, MN, ND, SD
Maximillian Sunflower	*Helianthus maximiliani*	native	UPL	MN, ND, SD
Showy Sunflower	*Helianthus pauciflorus*	native	UPL	MI, WI, MN, ND, SD
Missouri Goldenrod	*Solidago missouriensis*	native	UPL	WI, MN, ND, SD
Late Goldenrod	*Solidago gigantea*	native	FAC/OBL	MI, WI, MN, ND, SD
Stiff Goldenrod	*Solidago rigida*	native	FAC/UPL	MI, WI, MN, ND, SD
Wingstem	*Verbesina alternifolia*	native	OBL	MI, WI, MN

Approved Species List for Plantings Under CRP Honey Bee Initiative (Continued)

1/ Bloom time of the *Trifoliums* and the *Vicia* may extend into the early part of mid-season.

2/ *Asclepias* species (milkweeds) have the added benefits of supporting habitat for Monarch butterflies and using milkweeds should be encouraged in appropriate plantings. However, many species of milkweed are toxic to livestock (sheep, cattle, and occasionally horses). Avoid planting *Asclepias* species on range and pasture sites that will be grazed or hayed. See **http://www.ars.usda.gov/services/docs.htm?docid=9955**.

Note: NRCS recognizes that sweetclover (*Melilotus officinalis*) and birdsfoot trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*) are important species for honey bee forage. However, because of concerns about invasiveness for both species and potential poisoning of livestock and wildlife (coumarin poisoning) with improper management of sweetclover, NRCS limits the recommendation of these species in its conservation programs. State specialists have the option of adding these species to planting recommendations, if desired.

The following approved annual legumes and wildflowers can be incorporated as a component in perennial plantings to provide floral benefits the first season of planting. Use them at an appropriate percentage of the mix so they do **not** out-compete the perennial species.

Common Name	Species Name	Native Status
Canola	*Brassica napus, Brassica campestris,* or *Brassica rapa*	introduced
Partridge Pea	*Chamaecrista fasciculata*	nonnative to Northern Great Plains
Buckwheat	*Fagopyrum esculentum*	introduced
Annual Sunflower	*Helianthus annuus*	native
Lacy Phacelia	*Phacelia tanacetifolia*	nonnative to Northern Great Plains
Mustard, Tame	*Sinapis alba* or *Brassica juncea*	introduced
Berseem Clover	*Trifolium alexandrium*	introduced
Crimson Clover	*Trifolium incarnatum*	introduced
White Dutch / New Zealand White Clover	*Trifolium repens*	introduced
Common Vetch	*Vicia sativa*	introduced
Hairy Vetch	*Vicia villosa*	introduced
Cowpea	*Vigna unguiculata*	introduced