

UF research finds that 'killer' bees haven't stung U.S. honey production

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(PhysOrg.com) -- In just a few years after Africanized honey bees were introduced to Brazil in 1956, the aggressive bees had dominated and ruined domestic hives throughout South and Central America. According to University of Florida research, however, the same story isn't playing out in North America.

According to an economic analysis from UF's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, since their arrival in the U.S. in October 1990, Africanized honey bees (often called [killer bees](#)) haven't had a substantial economic impact on the honey production of domestic hives — even after spreading throughout 10 states.

The analysis, published online by the journal of *Ecological Economics*, seems to indicate virtually no hive loss to the bees — any economic loss was likely due to the cost of preventive measures taken by hive keepers to keep the Africanized bees away, said Charles Moss, one of the analysts behind the report and a professor in UF's department of food and resource economics.

“This helps to show that the primary concerns with Africanized honey bees are liability and safety, which are everyone's concern and aren't strictly attached to beekeepers,” Moss said. “Beekeepers already have a much more pressing economic concern from [Colony Collapse Disorder](#).”

CCD is a mysterious phenomenon which has reduced the population of honeybees in the U.S. by about a third every year since 2006.

Moss said that the analysis indicates that beekeepers have been taking the optimal actions to reduce the effects of Africanized bees — actions such as those widely promoted by state agencies.

“I am not surprised about the lack of effect of Africanized bees on honey production,” said Jamie Ellis of UF’s [Honey Bee](#) Research and Extension Laboratory, who helps inform Florida’s beekeepers on how to deal with Africanized bees.

Ellis, who did not participate in the economic analysis, says beekeepers usually change their management styles when Africanized bees are in the area. These steps can reliably keep Africanized bees from overtaking domestic hives.

However, certain factors, such as the need to replace queen bees more often, may drive costs up. And some beekeepers may lose money if they choose to leave lucrative bee-removal businesses due to worries about Africanized bee encounters.

Jerry Hayes, head of apiary inspection at the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, worries that a more severe economic impact on beekeepers may come from overzealous zoning of domestic beekeepers due to misguided worries that having domestic bees may attract the Africanized bees.

“Honey is a byproduct of pollination, which is the most important aspect of managed honey bees, he said. “If [beekeepers](#) are zoned, ordinances and restricted out of areas because of fear — then it is people putting the strain on the keepers and their ability to produce, not the Africanized [bees](#).”

Provided by University of Florida

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