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UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

RESOURCES AND ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

FEB 23 1973

Mr. Kenneth E. Frick, Administrator
Agricultural Stabilization and
Conservation Service
Department of Agriculture



Dear Mr. Frick:

On February 13, 1973, we issued a report to the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Agriculture - Environmental and Consumer Protection, House Committee on Appropriations, on our review of selected aspects of the Beekeeper Indemnity Payment Program administered by the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS). A copy of that report has been furnished to you.

In addition to the matters covered in that report, our review showed that ASCS county offices in Arizona and California needed more guidance in establishing recovery periods for damaged bee colonies to more effectively control payments to beekeepers. Although some of the recovery periods established by the county offices seemed unrealistically short, this matter was not included in our report to the Subcommittee Chairman because few 1972 payments had been made at the time of our fieldwork and, consequently, we could not determine whether the use of unrealistically short recovery periods had resulted in overpayments. Because of the potential for overpayments, we are bringing this matter to your attention for corrective action.

ASCS regulations set forth the terms and conditions under which indemnity payments will be made to eligible beekeepers who suffer losses of honeybees as a result of the application of Government-approved pesticides. Since June 10, 1972, the regulations have provided that, if a payment is made for a moderately or severely damaged colony, that colony is not eligible for further payments during the calendar year until it is restored to normal strength and again damaged by pesticides. In no case is the annual total of such payments, made on the basis of rates set for moderate (\$5 per colony) and severe (\$10 per colony) losses, to exceed \$15 per colony, the payment rate for a destroyed colony. Two or more pesticide losses involving the same bee colony were not uncommon in Arizona and California.

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ASCS county offices are responsible for determining when colonies once damaged have been restored to normal strength. ASCS instructions do not provide any guidelines for making these determinations. In the three counties we visited in Arizona and California, each county office used different criteria for determining restoration to normal strength as follows:

	Arizona		California
	Maricopa County	Yuma County	Imperial County

Recovery from:

Moderate damage	7 days	3 to 4 days	21 days
Severe damage	28 to 42 days	21 days	21 days

ASCS headquarters officials advised us that the recovery period depended to some extent on the action a beekeeper takes to counter the damage, such as adding healthy bees to the colony, and may vary to a small extent in different parts of the country because of differences in proximity to water and forage or other conditions. The officials stated, however, that there should be more uniformity in the length of recovery periods, regardless of location, and they agreed that guidelines on this matter should be provided to ASCS field offices.

Recommendation

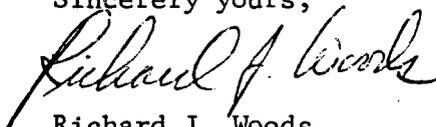
Because the recovery period for damaged colonies is an important factor in making sure that annual payments per colony do not exceed \$15, we recommend that ASCS provide guidance to its State and county offices in establishing realistic and more uniform recovery periods for damaged bee colonies.

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We would appreciate your comments and advice as to any action taken or planned on our recommendation. We will be glad to furnish additional information if you desire.

We wish to acknowledge the cooperation extended to our representatives during the review. A copy of this letter is being furnished to the Inspector General, Department of Agriculture.

Sincerely yours,



Richard J. Woods
Assistant Director