

**Dear Tennessee Legislator,**

**This letter is about a matter of truly great importance to every one of your constituents – the availability and cost of food. You see there is a very real threat to the majority of foods we consume and to our ecological systems. That threat is the rapidly declining populations of our insect pollinators – the honey bees and wild bees. Last winter honey bee colony losses ranged from 50% in West TN to 95% in East TN, and we are seeing similar losses again this winter, It is happening in other states and other countries, and many people are searching for a solution to this problem. However essentially nothing has been done in Tennessee until now. But that is about to change!**

**The University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture (UTIA) recently hired two PhD professors to address the declining populations of our pollinators. Dr. Jennifer Tsuruda is a honey bee specialist who came to UTIA on 1 February this year and Dr. Laura Russo is a wild bee specialist who reported to work on 1 March this year. Hiring these two highly qualified specialists was a great first step to addressing the pollinator decline. However UT submitted their FY 19-20 budget to Governor Lee with ZERO funding for support staff, supplies, and equipment needed for their work. And the existing “bee lab” on the UT campus is an obsolete and totally inadequate facility for their work. They need a new teaching facility on campus and a new field research lab on the UT Ag farm. Obviously these new facilities will have to be addressed in the UT capital program and will take some time to be available. But we need those facilities ASAP.**

**UTIA has developed a Pollinator health, Nutrition, Conservation, and Education program that addresses the various factors thought to be responsible for the declining pollinator populations. That program requires recurring funding of \$834,000 for the support staff and necessary supplies and equipment. This may sound like a lot of money for bees, but you must realize that honey bee pollination of agricultural crops in Tennessee annually produces an estimated \$500 Million in value added economic benefits. If we lose our honey bees we lose that value added benefit. And similar value added benefits are provided by the wild bees whose populations are also declining. This looks to me like better than a 500:1 return on investment in the UTIA pollinator program. I hope you agree and will help assure that the funding is included in this new budget.**

**I have attached a copy of a PowerPoint presentation I gave to the House Ag committee on 13 February. If you have a few minutes to look at the presentation It will give you a fuller understanding of the scope of the problem. And I urge you to speak with some of your beekeeper constituents about the bees.**

**Please feel free to contact me at 865-216-2550.**

**Howard Kerr for Tennessee Beekeepers Association  
20<sup>th</sup> District State Representative 1994-2000  
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