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Office of Pesticide Programs
Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Ave., NW.
Washington, DC 20460-0001

Subject: **Docket ID Number EPA-HQ-OPP-2014-0818**

Comments in Response to *Proposal To Mitigate Exposure to Bees From Acutely Toxic Pesticide Products; Notice of Availability.*

The attached comments are being submitted in response to the May 29, 2015 *Federal Register* notice regarding EPA's proposal to adopt mandatory pesticide label restrictions to protect managed bees under contract pollination services from acute contact pesticide exposure. These comments are being submitted on behalf of the Western Integrated Pest Management Center and provide input on honey bees and macadamia nut production in Hawai'i. The comments are those of a macadamia nut grower and are being submitted on behalf of the grower and the Western Integrated Pest Management Center.

Comments compiled and submitted by:

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Environmental Protection Agency

Re: Comments pertaining to EPA-HQ-2014-0002
Proposal to mitigate exposure to bees from acutely toxic pesticide products

I am David Schell. I am employed by Island Princess Macadamia Nut Company in Kea'au, Hawaii as the general manager of the farming operations. I would like to address some comments to the above referenced EPA proposal.

Macadamia is one of the many cultivated products that require cross-pollination to successfully set an economically viable crop. For this reason, in our orchards we maintain a small number of fixed (resident) bee colonies and we also support several yards managed by a local honey making operation. Although this operator uses palletized, conventional, Langstroth hive bodies - designed for mobility – he generally maintains a year-round population on our property. At this point, he is able to make a reasonable profit from the honey his hives produce and we have nothing more than a verbal understanding with him.

Currently, we enjoy an environment that is balanced and we have not been forced to resort to insecticides for controlling destructive pests. The only chemical agents we use, beyond regular applications of salt fertility (NPK), are glyphosates for weed control. (Although, as far as I know, this material does not present a danger to honey bees, we still maintain a buffer around hives during applications.) It would seem then, that the proposed mitigation is not relevant to our particular operation, however, Hawaii being susceptible to invasive species, I cannot guarantee that this will be the case in the future.

As it happens - Macadamia being extraordinarily impacted by microclimate - our particular orchards would qualify as being “indeterminate flowering”. Although there are two major blooming periods in a single calendar year, we have minor flowering present in the orchard on a year round basis. (To pick up this off-season bloom is the reason we established our own resident colonies. It is because of the property's close proximity to other sources of nectar and pollen that the honey operation maintains permanent yards.) Suffice to say, there is never a time when honeybees are not inside the orchards. While I have no practical, universal, solution to the dilemma presented by pesticide applications under these circumstances, I can say that we would make every effort to remove both our hives and those of the honey operation from the area prior to any application. This is common sense and good business and that notion brings me to what I would have to say about this entire proposal; to wit, is it adequate or even relevant in its present form form?

Before the honey operation staged any hives on our property we discussed in detail our use of chemical agents. Even before the revelations regarding the impact of nicotinamides on honeybees, he was concerned about any use of insecticides in the proximity of his yards. Unless I am gravely mistaken, I am sure any beekeeper with an ounce of brain matter is likewise sensitive to this. Indeed, if I were providing pollination services, I would have a clause in my contract with the grower either forbidding the use

of bee-toxic insecticides while my hives were in proximity or, at the very least, reasonable notification so that I could remove them before the grower makes application. A beekeeper that does not protect himself in this minimal manner, frankly, does not belong in business and it is folly to assume that the proposed labeling and modification to criminal statutes is going to change that.

What is more, any farmer who grows crops that rely on insect pollination is keenly aware of the disintegrating integrity of the nation's bee populations and would have to be deranged to knowingly apply a bee-toxic material while hives were present in his fields. Perhaps, with respect to conscientious growers, the tone of the label might be less severe.

Therefore, I recommend the following language be placed on the subject insecticides as an "advisory":

Ingredients present in this product are known to the EPA to be toxic to bees. Foliar application of this product to sites where bees from commercial pollination services are being employed may result in substantial bee death and consequent liability. Consult with your contractor and PCA before making any application.

Beyond that, another shortfall in this mitigation is that it doesn't address another very real threat to honeybees, which are insecticides being applied to neighboring fields. Bees have a foraging radius that can exceed ½ mile and it is unrealistic to assume they will not venture beyond a protected area to gather nectar, pollen or water. I think that the EPA should encourage – and fund - the creation of vehicles – such as websites run by local agricultural officials - through which beekeepers can access information on current insecticide use within the locality of their yards – especially during regional blooming periods. I believe we can go a long way to making the environment safer for honeybees if we improve the communication between growers, beekeepers, regional agricultural officials and pesticide suppliers. Encouraging the MP3 programs is a wise move, but the notion of "stakeholders" is flawed. The programs should be inclusive of everyone who can create through action a threat to pollinator populations. This would certainly include growers who are not raising bee-reliant crops in areas where pollination activities are taking place.

It is my experience that no one wants to see or, even worse, facilitate the collapse of our pollinator population. Honeybees are by far the most efficient pollinators on the planet and I believe there is general agreement that they are an invaluable resource. Knowledge of the threats to their well-being is the key to saving them. Labeling is crucial to that end, however, it, alone, is not enough and, in order for this proposal to be effective for mitigation, the EPA needs to expand it's scope to include education and to emphasize individual responsibility and good, logical business practices. To that end, the EPA should provide financial support – where it is within its authority – to individual state and county offices and non-profits concerned with the business of agriculture.

Thank you.