Scorching western drought weakens honeybees, threatening almond and fruit crops

A scorching drought is slashing honey production in North Dakota, the top producing state of the sweet syrup. That means fewer bees can thrive, which leads to even less honey.

The shortage of strong bee colonies, meanwhile, is putting West Coast cash crops like almonds, plums and apples at risk, according to more than a dozen interviews with farmers, bee experts, economists and farm industry groups.

[John] Miller and other Midwestern apiarists haul their drought-weakened insects by truck to California almond farms in the winter to pollinate orchards in the top global producer of the nuts increasingly in demand for milk substitutes. Then they move on to other fruits.

Follow the latest news and policy debates on sustainable agriculture, biomedicine, and other ‘disruptive’ innovations. Subscribe to our newsletter.

SIGN UP

The dearth of strong bee colonies and the resulting higher costs to lease them for pollination services will add to the challenges of West Coast growers already dealing with drought and, in California, soaring water costs. It could also add to soaring costs consumers are facing at grocery stores.

Scientists have linked weather extremes from severe heat to floods and droughts to climate change. Such weather events are rippling through the food chain, raising food costs and heaping economic pain on small-scale farmer — and devastating bee colonies.

This is an excerpt. Read the original post here.