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SPEAKERS

Guest, Stump The Chump, Jamie, Amy

Jamie 00:10
Welcome to Two Bees in a Podcast brought to you by the Honey Bee Research Extension Laboratory at the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences. It is our goal to advance the understanding of honey bees and beekeeping, grow the beekeeping community and improve the health of honey bees everywhere. In this podcast, you'll hear research updates, beekeeping management practices discussed and advice on beekeeping from our resident experts, beekeepers, scientists and other program guests. Join us for today's program. And thank you for listening to Two Bees in a Podcast.

Amy 00:48
Hello, everybody, and welcome to this segment of Two Bees in a Podcast. Today, I am excited to be joined by Seth Cross, who is the National Program Manager for ELAP. He's with the Farm Service Agency within the United States Department of Agriculture. And today, we are bringing him on to talk about what he manages on the national level, and that is the emergency assistance for livestock, honey bees, and farm-raised fish, also known as ELAP. So I'm excited to delve into this topic. I know that many beekeepers, especially commercial beekeepers, are quite familiar with the ELAP program. So we brought Seth on here to answer some of the questions that we had in general about ELAP. But before we get to that, Seth, why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself?

Guest 01:33
Well, great. And thanks for having me, Amy. I'll just give you a little bit of background about what I currently do and how I got here. So I've been the National Program Manager for the lab program since 2021. Prior to that, I worked in the national office with another program called the Noninsured Disaster Assistance Program. And so my background with FSA is mostly in disaster programs, but prior to that I grew up on a farm and ranch in western Nebraska. I currently live in Nebraska and work out of Washington, DC, but I've been working on ELAP, in the honey bee portion of it, since 2021, like I said before, and I spend most of my days either working with honey bees, livestock grower issues, or farm-raised fish issues. So ELAP is pretty much my life right now.

Jamie 02:18
So Seth, I want to thank you for joining us on this podcast because, honestly, this is a really big deal in the United States. We have a lot of international listeners, and for our international listeners, could you tell us what ELAP is and how it relates to beekeepers? And kind of within that question, think about everything related to ELAP. How long has the program been around? Why did it start? Where does the funding originate? Things like that.

Guest 02:39
I sure can, Jamie, thanks. The ELAP program itself was made permanent in the 2014 Farm Bill. Prior to that, it was typically an ad hoc disaster program that included whenever there's emergency disasters, it could come into play. But in '14, the Farm Bill added it as permanent. And when they added it as permanent, it came in a package. There are two other programs, the Livestock Forage program, and Livestock Indemnity Program, LFP and LIP programs, and they were all packaged together with ELAP. And what ELAP really is, is a catch-all for anything that's not covered under those other two programs, LFP and LIP, which includes honey bees. And so ELAP has captured all those other items that don't fall into those two categories of livestock and forage. Now, in 2018, ELAP was updated, because in 2014, it only had a $20 million cap to be included with those other two programs. And so it really wasn't a highly used program from 2014 until 2018. And then in 2018, ELAP had the payment limitation removed, meaning that the $20 million cap was taken off and ELAP was able to pay, pretty much an unlimited sum of money if there were enough applications. And so because of that, in 2018, the honey bee colony and hive losses that have been part of the program since 2014 were allowed to pretty much receive more money based off the losses of honey bee colonies and hive losses, which is what ELAP covers. ELAP also covers feed loss per honey bees. So in the cases of natural disaster, if you were to have feed in a location like in a shed or something and then that shed would be destroyed, you're also eligible to have that feed reimbursed. But the main purpose of ELAP for honey bees is colony and hive loss. And those losses have to be due to an eligible natural disaster event. So in essence, the colonies and the hives are the biggest payouts that we have in ELAP. And that's just kind of a base of the program itself for honey bees. But one of the other questions you may have asked was about funding. And I think, as I was saying before, when they removed the payment limitation in 2018, the funding comes from our commodity credit corporation or CCC funds, and the funding is basically appropriated through Congress and the CCC as some such is needed, meaning there isn't necessarily a limit. So if we do have a high amount of applications, we should always have funding to be able to pay the lab program for honey bee hive losses and colony losses.

Amy 03:15
So Seth, can you tell me how ELAP works? What does this look like? Who is in charge of distributing ELAP funds, etc.?

Guest 05:18
So FSA is a little bit unique within USDA, because we have local offices, we have a state office in every state in all 50 states, and then we have local offices, we consider county offices, out in the field. And then, of course, there's also national office employees, which I am one of, but I did start my career in a

county office and have worked in the state office as well before coming to the national office. And the beauty of what FSA has in that local outreach and local availability is that we encourage our producers, the honey bee producers, to find their local FSA office if they want to participate in the ELAP program, because that's really the opening gate of where producers can go to find out more about the ELAP program, should they suffer an eligible loss. And just so you're aware, they can go out and locate where the local offices are at www.farmers.gov. Our website has an office locator for county offices, and they can go out and contact those county offices and let them know if they're producers. What I always encourage people to do if they are commercial honey bee producers is that they reach out to that county office because they're the ones that are out in the field that are going to handle the program part of it. When you try to apply for the program to handle the applications, if you file a notice of loss, and I'll get into that a little more detail, but when you file a notice of loss for your weather event, and then apply for a payment, those all have to go through the county office.

Jamie 06:45
So Seth, as I'm listening to you talk, some of the things that are going into my mind, like what scenarios might prompt beekeepers to need to complete ELAP paperwork? In other words, what would qualify? What does it mean "colony losses" in this context?

Guest 06:58
Okay, so colony loss is basically one colony that's producing honey. For commercial beekeepers, you have to be producing honey in order to be eligible for a colony. And of course, for commercial beekeepers that raise multiple colonies, there's a few different qualifications. One of them, we do have eligibility based off of the colony collapse disorder. And there are some items that have to be met in order to be eligible under ELAP for colony collapse disorder. And really, it's just a matter of filling out a form and applying for the program itself. But you do a two-piece process, as I said earlier. You have to file a notice of loss, which is letting FSA know that you suffered a loss either due to CCD or due to a natural weather event. So a good example for a weather event that would maybe destroy a colony would be a tornado or something like that, to that effect. High winds or a wildfire that would destroy a hive and also destroy a colony. Those would be examples of eligible notices of loss that you could file within FSA. But colony collapse disorder is our biggest payout for producers that suffer losses under CCD. I understand that CCD is really hard to define. FSA has tried to do that the best that they can. And most producers that work under ELAP, once they kind of understand what the requirements are for CCD losses, which is really just identifying the different aspects of what you've noticed from your colony being lost, it's relatively easy to file that paperwork for a notice of loss. And once you file a notice of loss, there are deadlines, they have to be followed. So if you're going to file a notice of loss, we used to have you file that notice of loss within 30 days of when that loss occurred. But in 2023, we extended that out to all the way till January 30 because, in a lot of cases with disaster, producers are dealing with the disaster, and the last thing they want to do is come in contact FSA to let them know that their hives and their colonies have been destroyed. So we've extended that out so they can file a notice of loss all the way out to January 30 of the following year. So for 2024, that'll be January 30 of 2025. But of course, there's also a limit date that they have to file an application for payment as well. And both pieces are necessary in order to get paid. And that date is the same as the notice of loss deadline of January 30 of 2025.

Amy 09:17
Seth, is this just for commercial beekeepers? Let's say we have hobbyists or sideline beekeepers out there, what is the criteria as far as whether you're a commercial beekeeper or not within ELAP?

Guest 09:29
So one of the requirements to participate in the lab is you have to file an acreage report now for honey bees. Of course, that really is more of an inventory report. So every year prior to January 1, any commercial beekeeper would have to come in and tell us where their bees are located and how many colonies that they currently have. If a hobby beekeeper is not producing honey commercially, typically they wouldn't be eligible. There are some eligibility requirements that you have to fill out including a SCC 902 form to show how you are a commercial beekeeper, meaning the inputs that you are using and is there a revenue process for the production of honey or the pollenization of the different locations that you may be at? What is the intent of your operation is really what FSA asks, and producers identify that and then we make that determination if they're eligible under the law.

Amy 10:21
So I wanted to clarify something that you said real quickly about the change in deadline and what that is. So I just want to clarify, it used to be that it was 30 days following colony losses. Now, the new rule is that it's changed to January 30 of the following year.

Guest 10:38
Yes, that's correct. So you are right. I mean, producers did have to come in and file that notice of loss within 30 days. But in 2023, the Deputy Administrator of Farm Programs agreed to extend that out for 2023 and 2024. And it wasn't a rule change. It was extended based off the authority of the Deputy Administrator. After 2024, we'll review that policy again. We're really kind of just waiting to see if there's a farm bill from Congress and whether or not we can update the rules under ELAP to extend that out permanently. So as of 2024, yes, that extension exists out to January 30.

Amy 11:16
So the beekeepers really just need to contact your local FSA office, right?

Guest 11:20
They do. And I would encourage any commercial beekeeper to reach out to FSA in their local county office multiple times. I always tell producers when I see them, the worst time to come into our office is right after a disaster event for both you and for the office. Because the employees, if they don't have a relationship with you, they have to do a lot of paperwork in order to get to a point where we can make a payment for the loss of colonies and hives or bee feed. And so the more interaction we get with the producer prior to them ever having a disaster, the easier it is for us to actually process their application and administer the program. So, the requirement to come in and certify is every year prior to January 1. And that's probably one of the most important things that I would encourage producers to do is let us know where those bees are at. The other thing that is required for FSA is that if you move your bees from one location to another outside of the county that they're currently residing in, let's say that, for

instance, we have a lot of producers in the Midwest that move their bees out to California and down to Texas during the growing seasons for almonds, those producers, they are required to come in and let us know that they're moving those colonies to a different state. And we have a DCC 771 form. It's really easy, you just fill that out, tell us where they're moving to, identify the state that they're going to, and that helps us update the applications as well, because what happens is that they're a long ways away from where you live. For instance, if I'm in Nebraska, and I have honey bee colonies out in California, and they suffer a disaster event, let's say a tornado or something like that, it's really hard for the Nebraska offices to understand the event that occurred out in California. So they would contact the local office out in California to verify that that event occurred and work with them to establish what the losses are. You can file the application in Nebraska if you still live there, but we work with the county out in California to determine what that event is.

Amy 13:18
Great. Yeah, that's awesome information that you mentioned, a couple of things that are important for beekeepers to know when they're filing for ELAP. Are there other important things that commercial beekeepers need to know about completing the paperwork?

Guest 13:32
The biggest thing for us is always record keeping. What's an acceptable record? And one of the things that happens whenever we have a producer that comes in and file a notice of loss, and they file an application, that next year when they come back in and they re-establish those colonies, they come in with nucs, and they're always splitting colonies and trying to increase their number of colonies, there is some information that FSA typically asks for as proof that you're either purchasing queen bees or nucs to establish more colonies or if you are splitting colonies to show us what other input costs that you may have incurred in order to increase that number of colonies back up to what your established amount of colonies was for prior year. And I'm not a commercial beekeeper, but I can at least understand what commercial beekeepers are trying to do when they're trying to reestablish their colonies after they suffer a loss. And of course, we know that there's normal mortality as well. So as beekeepers do, they just continuously are upgrading and updating and increasing because they are losing bees every year and we understand that at FSA. What we ask for is just that you let us know how you're creating those colonies, either through purchasing or raising them on your own and increasing that population back up.

Jamie 14:55
Seth, thank you for providing so much information on the ELAP program. Are you aware of other federal programs that provide assistance in any way to beekeepers?

Guest 15:03
Actually, that's a great question, Jamie. I think I mentioned earlier in the podcast that I used to work under the Noninsured Disaster Assistance Program or the NAP program, NAP. NAP actually covers producers for honey loss suffered due to a natural weather event. So if a producer wants to participate in the NAP program, it's a little bit different. You have to file an application and there is a small fee to participate in that. But if you have production over an extended period of time and establish that

production, should you suffer a loss, NAP will pay you for a percentage of the lost honey that you have due to natural disaster. So that's another program that a lot of our honey bee producers participate in.

Amy 15:42
I think this is all really great information, Seth. Jamie and I being in extension, we don't know all the rules, and we don't know some of the answers to some of these things. But it's really great to know where to find this and to be able to have you all as a resource. So thank you so much for that information.

Guest 15:58
Oh, of course. One other thing to keep in mind, just talking about NAP triggered this for me. It doesn't cost anything to participate in ELAP. So anytime that you're wanting to apply or file a notice of loss, or an application for payment, there is no charge. So it's all free. It's just really a matter of the paperwork that needs to be done and all the interaction with the county office, just kind of letting us know what your process is for your operation because we know that everybody's different in how they handle their commercial operation. And we want to do the best that we can to try to make it as simple as possible. So the more interaction, obviously, the better.

Amy 16:32
Absolutely. And for our listeners out there, we will be sure to link these resources on the additional resources page on our website. But thank you, Seth, so much for joining us today.

Guest 16:43
Oh, you guys, I tell you what, I really appreciate you having me on. It's great to be able to talk about the program. I know it's really beneficial for commercial producers within the US. And if you ever have any questions, please reach out to me. I'd be happy to hop on the podcast again.

Amy 17:03
As I mentioned, Jamie, earlier, we don't have all the answers. So it's really nice to be able to speak to program managers at the county, at the state, and the federal level. But this Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honey Bees and Farm-raised Fish, this ELAP program is available to the United States beekeepers, especially the commercial beekeepers out there.

Jamie 17:23
The original intent, the motivation behind the program is really good, this idea that there are emergency situations that beekeepers encounter. Seth mentioned two specific things, colony collapse disorder, as well as weather events. And I can speak for sure, over the last five years in Florida, as an example, there have been significant weather events that have either killed colonies outright, wind or flooding, or maybe caused stress later because the damage was so bad that it killed a lot of forage and bees didn't have forage available. Lots of things go into that. I think, if you're an international beekeeper listening to us, Amy and I are curious if you guys have similar federal assistance programs. If your commercial beekeepers encounter some sort of disaster, why don't you let us hear about it through some of our social media? You can tell us, yeah, we have some, we don't have some, maybe we'd like to implement

something here. But, again, Amy, the original intent, it was when beekeepers face truly significant disasters that, for lack of a better term, out of place, out of time, affect their colonies, the government's able to come in and provide some assistance to those beekeepers.

Amy 18:30
Yeah, I think Seth did a really good job laying it out and letting beekeepers know that they should be contacting their local FSA offices. We'll be sure, again, to link that information in our show notes.

Stump The Chump 18:48
It's everybody's favorite game show, Stump the Chump.

Amy 18:59
Welcome back to the question and answer segment. Jamie, the first question I have for you is about Brazilian pepper. So here in Florida, we have Brazilian pepper that normally blooms in the fall. Many beekeepers really love to overwinter in Florida because of our Brazilian pepper and the time that it's usually in bloom. And so this person is saying Brazilian pepper is now in full bloom. But they don't see any bees on it. They kind of noticed the same thing with saw palmetto, which is also another Florida plant. They're just kind of wondering what's going on. There are no pesticides being used. Everything seems to be fine. Are these plants only putting out nectar at certain times of day? Maybe it's the time of day that they're going out and looking for bees and not seeing them. So what are your thoughts on this?

Jamie 19:41
So, Amy, I'm gonna broaden this a little bit for our listeners globally. So Amy's right, we've got this plant called Brazilian pepper that's invasive in the southern half of the state. It's very, very invasive. In fact, so much so that the state and lots of different organizations work to try to get rid of it. But just like, Amy, you said it's a very important honey plant in late summer, early fall for our bee colonies. And so a lot of beekeepers move bees to it. So the questioner is basically saying, hey, I got bees, I got Brazilian pepper, why aren't my bees going to it? Well, there are a few possible answers here. First possible answer is because I've had the same thing happen. Like in my yard, when I had bee colonies in my yard, I would have things like gallberry, which is a very important honey plant in Central Florida, growing in my yard, but I'd never see bees own it. So there were a couple of reasons for that. Number one is it's often that there are bigger stands of nectar-producing plants elsewhere. So they're flying over your two or three plants to go to acres and acres of that those plants, and that was probably one of the reasons, in my case with gallberry and potentially one of the reasons for the questioner's case with Brazilian pepper. Another possibility like here in North Central Florida, we get this emergence of a fly that people around here affectionately call love bugs, and love bugs are attracted to white flowers, and they will cover my gallberry at a time that it's blooming. And there's clear evidence that honey bees are repelled by the presence of love bugs, that's research down the road. So maybe there are some things going on with your plants in your yard, maybe you're getting a similar love bug emergence that's causing bees to be repelled. But my honest guess is that they're just going to bigger stands of Brazilian pepper. Honey bees like Brazilian pepper, we know that's the case. When it's in bloom, it's in bloom everywhere. So maybe they're just simply flying over the few plants you may have in your yard and

going elsewhere. You did ask specifically about timing. There are different times of the day that flowers will have nectar. I'm not overly familiar with the timing in Brazilian pepper nectar production. But I know, for example, in blueberries, something I knew a lot about because my wife studied it, blueberry flowers produce a lot of nectar early in the morning, and by mid-morning, it's completely exhausted. So honey bees weren't getting nectar after about 10 or 12 o'clock. And it can be a very similar case. Maybe all the nectar has been taken early in the morning when you weren't looking or maybe nectar is being released in the middle of the day. So my guess is there are just multiple potential reasons. And there are some off years. Well, maybe there wasn't the appropriate rainfall. So maybe you've just got a few plants that weren't optimally producing nectar because they didn't get optimum environmental conditions to do that. But my sneaky suspicion is it has more to do with just density, that they're going to bigger patches of Brazilian pepper. Make no mistake, they're visiting it somewhere.

Amy 22:34
All right. So we are recording this podcast right now. We're recording in January of 2024. This probably won't be going out for a couple of months, I'd say. But in recent forums, the second question is that people have noticed that there's been an increased awareness of tropilaelaps and that being a threat to Apis mellifera here in the United States. And so Jamie, you and I have been to a lot of meetings in the past couple of years, we've seen that increase, we've known about tropilaelaps. There's a lot of upcoming research on tropilaelaps. Beekeepers are now asking about tropilaelaps. So if we've known about this mite for a while, what's changed? I feel like I know what your answer is going to be. But I'm going to let you answer it for our listeners.

Jamie 23:16
Amy, I'm going to be very politically sensitive in my answer to this question. I am going to say that we are being proactive in addressing this issue. So let me give you some story behind that. When Varroa came, they showed up, we weren't ready. When tracheal mites came, they showed up, we weren't ready. When small hive beetle came, they showed up, we weren't ready. And we found ourselves as a research industry as a beekeeping industry trying to catch up with the things that we were experiencing in real-time. With colony losses being a major news story in the last 15 years, it's produced a lot of scientists and a lot of interest in potential problems, not just existing problems so that we can stay ahead of those potential problems. And one of the possible problems is tropilaelaps. And just like the questioner asked, its tropilaelaps galore. It's on all the talks, it's on all the YouTube sites, it's just everywhere. Well, we don't have tropilaelaps. So all of this stuff is information to prepare you, one, in the event it comes, two, to keep you on the lookout and, three, to provide information on a pest that, if it were to arrive, could be a problem for bees. So I like the fact that folks are being very proactive with it. And there's lots of research money on tropilaelaps right now because folks are trying to be proactive. Now, it's a whole different series of questions with regard to will it actually be a problem? I know a lot of the research coming out suggest that it may, but frankly, there's so much acaricide to control Varroa and tropilaelaps has such an intimate relationship with bee brood, I think it might be way easier to manage. But we just won't know until or if it gets here. So I feel like it's appropriate, it's making us aware. The only concern I have about it, given the timing of our talk, is that we do have a new invasive species here that is a potential problem for bees, the yellow-legged hornet, and it's really glossed over compared to something like tropilaelaps, it's not here. So I hope that we continue to focus on things that

are actually emerging, and not just things that are potentially a problem someday. But frankly, the best way to deal with it is to deal with it proactively, like what's happening right now. Yeah, and I think that's great. There are not many times when people, I think, in general, are proactive about concerns. It's really good to hear. So Jamie, I've heard you say this a million times. But you're always saying, there's always something else. Tropilaelaps may or may not come here, with the yellow-legged horney, the yellow-legged hornet is in the United States, but not confirmed in Florida right now. It'll just be crazy and interesting to see what happens just in the future of everything else because there's always that next thing. Yeah, you hit the nail on the head. It just drives me crazy. I feel like once we are on top of something, and we've got it relatively figured out, it's like, it's the next thing. So I think the coverage of tropilaelaps is appropriate. We're preparing, we're studying in advance in case it ever shows up in the US. And listen, this is a global podcast and tropilaelaps is spreading outside of its native range. We've heard rumors about some places that it is outside of its native range. I won't give legs to those rumors yet. But we know that it's potentially spreading. We also have to deal with real-time emerging threats, like we're experiencing here with Vespa velutina, the yellow-legged hornet, which we're not the only ones experiencing that, that's happening in Europe, and other places around the world as well. So all of these are important issues that we need to address. And I'm grateful that, at least in the case of tropilaelaps, we're trying to stay ahead of the issue.

Amy 27:01
Okay, so for the third question that we have, this person's just done a cut-out and they have eight frames. So they basically have the comb in the frames held together with rubber bands, and they're trying to figure out what's the next step after that. Do they just let the colony sit there? Keep that comb in the rubber bands? And is there any reason to replace any of the foundation? Or what do they do?

Jamie 27:23
Yeah, good questions, Amy. So, I'm going to expand a little bit for the benefit of the listeners. So a cut-out is simply a removal of a feral colony, right? There's a feral colony nesting somewhere that people don't want them. So they reach out to a beekeeper, a beekeeper comes, opens up that nest cavity, removes the comb, removes the bees, and tries to hive it in a managed box. And so they cut out the comb. So it's a cut-out. That may be a new term to a lot of folks outside of the US. One of the interesting things that folks do with combs is -- when I was a brand new beekeeper, and I was the guy that they were calling to remove bees in the area where I grew up, I would simply shake the bees in the old two frames of foundation in a managed box and let them pull out new comb all the frames of foundation. But 10 years after I started doing that, I started seeing beekeepers take the existing comb, and put them into empty frames, and use really large rubber bands to secure that comb into these empty frames. And I'm like, gosh, that's genius. That way, you're not destroying the combs or the brood or the honey or the pollen that the bees had in their nest, and you're integrating it into the wooden frames by virtue of using these rubber bands. And so the questioner is saying, well, should I just keep the colony moving forward with these combs? Or should I replace those combs? And the answer is, it's up to you. There are going to be some pros and cons of both. If you leave the comb that you rubberbanded into the frames in the nest, the bees will fill the gaps and expand that comb to fill the frame almost as if they were building comb on a frame of foundation. The catch is they don't always do it perfectly. So while they're expanding that comb, you have to be willing to go into the nest with some

regularity and remove any comb that's being built the wrong direction or between frames and things like that. It's almost like you have to hold the bees hands through that process to ensure the comb is ending up exactly where you want it to be. The second downside to allowing the bees to finish out that comb and use exclusively natural comb is it's not stable. The reason folks wire foundation into frames, the reason some beeswax foundation has wires in it, the reason we have plastic foundation is because those wires and that plastic adds stability to those combs so you can turn those frames sideways. During inspection, you can remove the frames, you can travel with the nest, etc. When you don't have those wires or that plastic, then the combs are less stable. So if you turn a frame horizontally, the comb might fall out. So it's really up to you. You can leave it in there if you want it to remain in there, just know that you're going to lose some stability and you're going to have to help the bees develop it the appropriate way. On the other hand, if you elect to take it out, essentially, once brood emerges from frames, you would rotate those frames to the edge of the nest, frames of foundation to the middle of the nest, and hope that the bees build comb on the foundation, the queen lays eggs in those cells, and then as those older combs that you rubberbanded into the frames become empty, then you just rotate those out of the hive and replace them with new frames of foundation. So both efforts require some work. There are pros and cons to both sides. And it's honestly up to you, however you want to approach it.

Amy 30:53
Sounds good. All right, listeners. If you've got questions, feel free to send us a message on one of our social media pages or you can email us: honeybee@IFAS.ufl.edu Thanks for listening to today's episode. This episode was edited and produced by our podcast coordinator Mitra Hamzavi. Thanks, Mitra.

Jamie 31:21
Visit the UF/IFAS Honey Bee Research and Extension Laboratory's website, UFhoneybee.com, for additional information and resources for today's episode. Email any questions that you want answered on air to honeybee@ifas.ufl.edu. You can also submit questions to us on X, Instagram, or Facebook @UFhoneybeelab. Don't forget to follow us while you're visiting our social media sites. Thank you for listening to Two Bees in a Podcast.