

NIFA in the News – Week of May 6, 2013

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In the News

Team comparing genetics of ancient and modern wheat (Ag Professional 5/2).

Eduard Akhunov knows that sometimes, in order to prepare for the future, we need to study the past. The Kansas State University plant pathologist is leading an international team of researchers in comparing the genetic code of ancient wheat varieties to that of modern varieties with a goal of improving wheat for different growing conditions throughout the world. The project was funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). In the Triticeae Coordinated Agricultural Project, funded by USDA's NIFA, Akhunov's team is sequencing 200 wheat varieties. The data, combined with resources developed by the International Wheat Genome Sequencing Consortium (IWGSC), will lay the foundation for next-generation breeding strategies that use modern genomics and informatics approaches to improve wheat, the researcher said. [Link](#)

Study suggests honeybee collapse has many culprits (Miami Herald 5/2). But a U.S. Department of Agriculture and Environmental Protection Agency report issued Thursday suggests a complex mix of problems contributing to honeybee colony declines, which first emerged 2006. Contributors include parasites and disease, genetics, poor nutrition and pesticide exposure, as well as farming practices that don't give bees a pesticide-free buffer zone to forage in heavily developed agricultural regions. "Modern farming practices are leaving very little room for bees and other pollinators at this moment," Sonny Ramaswamy, director of the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture, said in a conference call explaining the report. [Link](#)

USDA and EPA Release Honey Bee Health Report (Ag Wired 5/2). The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) today released a comprehensive scientific report on honey bee health. The report states that there are multiple factors playing a role in honey bee colony declines, including parasites and disease, genetics, poor nutrition and pesticide exposure. "The challenges are complex and there is no smoking gun," said Sonny Ramaswamy, Administrator of USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

“It is imperative that we take action to address the factors contributing to the decline in honey bees and the continuing impact that our farmers and honeybee producers are facing as well.” [Link](#)

Bee die-off is linked to many causes (Minneapolis Star Tribune 5/3). A lethal combination of pesticides, parasites and disease, coupled with a shortage of flowers, has been identified as the cause of a perilous decline in honeybees that could soon threaten the nation’s food supply. But there is insufficient evidence to single out insecticides that many beekeepers blame for the die-off, and which may be banned in Europe, federal officials said Thursday in releasing a comprehensive new report on the health of honeybees. In a telephone news conference, they said that bees are threatened by many complicated hazards and that the costs of a pesticide ban might exceed the benefits. They called for more research on the role of agricultural chemicals, and, in the meantime, further steps to protect bees and other pollinators. “As in most things biological, there is no smoking gun,” said Sonny Ramaswamy, director of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture at the U.S. Department of Agriculture. [Link](#)

Federal agricultural officials swat down Europe’s pesticide ban to aid bees (Tribune-Review 5/3). Federal officials are rejecting steps the European Union took to ban three pesticides that beekeepers associate with sharp declines in the honeybee population. A report on honeybee health, issued on Thursday by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Agriculture, said factors beyond pesticide exposure weaken honeybee colonies crucial to American agriculture, including parasites, disease, genetics and poor nutrition. “As in most things biological, there is no smoking gun,” said Sonny Ramaswamy, director of the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture. “The decline in honeybee health is a complex problem caused by a combination of stressors,” acting EPA Administrator Bob Perciasepe said, during a conference call with reporters to discuss the report. [Link](#)

Report on Honeybee Decline Cites a Mess of Factors (Nebraska PBS 5/3). A new government report on the decline of honeybee colonies in the U.S. stresses that no single cause is responsible for the spiraling losses. Instead, it's a complex mess of factors that includes exposure to pesticides, lack of food source for the bees and a variety of pests and pathogens. The report was released jointly by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the EPA on Thursday. Some \$20 to 30 billion of U.S. agricultural production is dependent on honeybee pollination, according to Sonny Ramaswamy, director of the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture. And colonies are dying at a rate of 30 percent a year, according to the report. [Link](#)

USDA Report on Honey Bee Health (Tri States Public Radio 5/3). A new report from the USDA identifies multiple reasons why honey bees are dying off in the United States. Dr. Sonny Ramaswamy says most people do not realize how dependant we are on honey bees and other insects or animals that transfer pollen. Dr. Ramaswamy is the Director of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture. He says up to \$30-billion, annually, in agricultural product depends on pollinators. "Crops like

almonds, cucumbers, apples, blueberries, alfalfa seed and a whole host of others are directly dependent on pollination in order to be able to produce set fruit." [Link](#)

Report can't pin down one cause for loss of honey bees (Radio Iowa 5/4). A new report identifies numerous reasons why honey bees are dying off across the United States. Sonny Ramaswamy, the director of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, says most people do not realize how dependent states like Iowa are on honey bees and other insects or animals that transfer pollen. He says the production of up to 30-billion dollars annually in agricultural product depends on pollinators. "Crops like almonds, cucumbers, blueberries, apples, alfalfa — there's a whole host of others as well — that are directly dependent on pollination in order to be able to produce set fruit," Ramaswamy says. A wide range of people with interest in the problem s met last fall to try and figure out why the honey bees are dying. Ramaswamy says the report released this week by the U.S.D.A. which summarized the conference could not point the finger at one problem. [Link](#)

N.C. State researchers explore using herbal oils to kill pathogens on fruits, vegetables (Charlotte Observer 5/5). Perkins-Veazie might see the dark side of fruits and vegetables, but she also sees a potential solution. She and other researchers at N.C. State and the University of Tennessee are experimenting with the use of oils extracted from herbs or spices to kill dangerous pathogens such as E. coli, listeria and salmonella on organically grown tomatoes, cantaloupe and other produce. The project is funded with a \$1.9 million grant through the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative. The institute is a division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. [Link](#)

Honeybee shortage threatens Pennsylvania crops (Pittsburg Post Gazette 5/6). Pennsylvania beekeepers lost 38 percent of their honeybee colonies last year, according to Bee Informed, a partnership of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture formed to address bee colony decline. [Link](#)

Colony Collapse, A Very Serious Problem (KWBE 5/6). For the past several years scientists and environmentalists have been studying what is causing "colony collapse" or the huge decline in the bee population. Dr. Sonny Ramaswamy is the director of the U-S Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture and says they have been researching the decline in honey bee populations and says there isn't just one cause. [Link](#)

LED lights reduce costs for greenhouse tomato growers (Southeast Farm Press 5/6). Tomatoes grown around LED lights in the winter can significantly reduce greenhouse energy costs without sacrificing yield, according to a Purdue University study. The Specialty Crop Initiative of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture funded this study. [Link](#)

UW-Madison gets \$9.9 million to help make dairy industry greener (Madison

State Journal 5/6). Researchers from UW-Madison will lead a study funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture aimed at making the dairy industry greener by finding climate solutions such as the reduction of greenhouse gases. UW-Madison is receiving \$9.9 million over five years for the climate research study, which Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack hopes will help the country sustain its agricultural prowess by keeping up with climate changes. Reducing greenhouse gases will be a major focus of the study, which could have long-ranging implications for the dairy industry, according to Raymond Knighton, the project manager for the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture. [Link](#)

USDA Secretary Vilsack to Visit Wisconsin Today (Wisconsin Ag Connection 5/6). U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack will be in Madison on Tuesday to announce a new research project that could reduce the impact of climate variability on the dairy and beef industries. USDA officials say the announcement is part of a broader effort focused on reducing greenhouse gas emissions in agricultural and forest production systems to adapt to a changing climate. Last month, Secretary Vilsack renewed a historic agreement with U.S. dairy producers to accelerate the adoption of innovative waste-to-energy projects and energy efficiency improvements on U.S. dairy farms. Vilsack says partnerships like these solidify USDA and the dairy industry's commitment to use sound, science-based information and solutions to help make management decisions that will sustain productivity and economically viable. [Link](#)

Take that 'carbon footprint' down another shoe size (Dairy Herd Network 5/7). Last month, the U.S. Department of Agriculture renewed support for dairy producers to become more environmentally sustainable. Now, some of these resources are being directed to one Upper Midwest university. According to the Wisconsin State Journal, the University of Wisconsin-Madison will receive \$9.9 million from the USDA over the next five years to reduce the industry's carbon footprint by finding climate solutions. [Link](#)

UW wins greenhouse gas grant (Milwaukee Journal Sentinel 5/7). The stench of manure smells like opportunity for the University of Wisconsin-Madison that's getting part of a \$10 million federal grant to study greenhouse gases emitted from dairy farms. The five-year project was announced Tuesday by U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack who was in Madison for a tour of the USDA's Dairy Forage Research Center on the UW-Madison campus. "Walmart has a big environmental sustainability push going on. They leaned fairly heavily on the dairy industry and identified milk as one of the top-six products they stock in stores that have a very negative environmental footprint. That really brought the industry to the table," said Ray Knighton, project manager at USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture. [Link](#)

UW wins federal grant to study greenhouse gases (AP/San Francisco Chronicle/ Ct Post/ Seattle Post Intelligencer / Albany Times Union /The Republic/ San Antonio Express/ Danbury News Times/ Houston Chronicle/ WRAL/WAOW/

WKBT La Crosse 5/8). The University of Wisconsin-Madison will lead new research on reducing greenhouse gases emitted from dairy farms. UW-Madison will get part of a \$10 million federal grant announced by U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack during a stop in Madison Tuesday. The university will work with six other schools and five federal laboratories to improve dairy production and reduce greenhouse gases blamed for climate change. The research will include every aspect of a dairy farm, including methane gas from manure. The Journal Sentinel says the dairy industry has pledged to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 25 percent in the next seven years. Vilsack toured the USDA's Dairy Forage Research Center during his visit to the Madison campus. [Link](#)

University of Wisconsin-Madison Receives Grant from USDA (WKOW-ABC 5/8). UW-Madison will soon be expanding its research on the dairy industry. While visiting campus yesterday, U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced UW will get nearly 10 million dollars from the federal government. The project will focus on improving dairy farm production while reducing environmental pollution. Vilsack says UW's research emphasizes the importance of having a new farm bill, now that the 2008 farm bill has expired. You just can't underscore the significance of research and its particular tie to productivity in American agriculture. The USDA project also works to improve education in public schools to encourage young people to get involved in agriculture. [Link](#)

USDA awards university \$9.9M grant (UW Badger Herald 5/8). A \$9.9 million grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to the agriculture research department of University of Wisconsin will fund efforts for a more sustainable dairy industry. This grant will be used to perform multi-institutional and multi-state test research, according to Raymond Knighton, a national program leader at the National Institute of Food and Agriculture from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. "The grant is one of the numbers of what we call coordinated agricultural project," Knighton said. The USDA rewarded UW the majority of the grant, according to Knighton. He said Wisconsin is responsible for 48 percent of dairy production in the U.S. geographically and added the state has many qualified experts for sustainable dairy research. [Link](#)

USDA Funds Major Research Initiatives to Study the Effects of Weather and Climatic Variability on Beef and Dairy Cattle (USDA.gov/ ScoopSanDiego.com 5/7). The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) today awarded \$19.5 million to support research, education and Extension activities associated with climate solutions in agriculture aimed at the impacts of climate variability and change on dairy and beef cattle. USDA remains focused on carrying out its mission, despite a time of significant budget uncertainty. Today's announcement is one part of the Department's efforts to strengthen the rural economy. [Link](#)

WSU researchers aid fight against citrus greening disease (Capital Press 5/8). Researchers at Washington State University are working to fight an insect pest that spreads bacteria to U.S. orange trees. The Asian citrus psyllid spreads the citrus greening disease by piercing citrus trees with a needle-like mouthpiece, similar to a

mosquito transmitting malaria, according to WSU. As it feeds on the tree's water and nutrients, the psyllid injects the bacteria, which spreads throughout the rest of the plant. The \$9 million, five-year project is funded by USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture's Specialty Crop Research Initiative and led by the Citrus Research and Development Foundation, based in Lake Alfred, Fla. [Link](#)

Research Project To Study Link Between Farms, Climate (Wisconsin Public Radio 5/8). U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced a grant for researching agriculture and the climate, during a visit to Wisconsin today. Few industries depend on the climate as much as farming. Bad weather can spell disaster for crops and animals. So the U.S. Department of Agriculture is funding a \$10-million climate research project that includes the University of Wisconsin (UW)-Madison. During a visit to the campus, Vilsack says a department study indicates that weather patterns are becoming more intense and more variable: "Two years ago there was too much water last year there wasn't enough water and now, it depends on where you are — you may have too much or too little." [Link](#)

U.S. Ag Secretary expands Dairy Industry Research (WKOW-ABC 5/8). UW-Madison will soon be expanding its research on the dairy industry. Visiting campus Tuesday, U.S. Agriculture Secretary, Tom Vilsack, announced the UW will get nearly \$10-million from the federal government. The project will focus on improving dairy farm production while reducing environmental pollution. Vilsack says UW's research emphasizes the importance of having a new farm bill, now that the 2008 farm bill has expired. "You just can't underscore the significance of research and its particular tie to productivity in American agriculture," says Vilsack. [Link](#)

UW-Madison Wins Grant to Study Greenhouse Gases (WEAU-NBC 5/8). UW-Madison will lead new research on reducing greenhouse gases emitted from dairy farms. the university will get part of a \$10 million federal grant announced by U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack during a stop in Madison yesterday. The university will work with six other schools and five federal laboratories to improve dairy production and reduce greenhouse gases blamed for climate change. The research will include every aspect of a dairy farm, including methane gas from manure. [Link](#)

USDA Research To Study Effects of Climate on Dairy, Beef Cattle (Farm Futures 5/8). U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack announced May 7 at the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus, that the USDA has awarded \$19.5 million to support research, education and Extension activities associated with climate change and its impact on dairy and beef. The UW-Madison received \$9.9 million over five years to study the environmental impact of various dairy production systems and develop best management practices for producers to implement at the farm level. The project's ultimate goal is to increase the resiliency of dairy production systems while reducing greenhouse gas emissions, Vilsack said. [Link](#)

USDA to Fund Project to Help Adapt Dairying to Climate Change (Wisconsin

Ag Connection 5/8). Agricultural scientists from across the country will be taking part of a new effort funded by the USDA to identify dairy and beef production practices that minimize the emission of greenhouse gasses. On Tuesday, U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack unveiled details about the program during a visit to the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Dairy Forage Research Center. The five-year, \$19.5 million initiative aims to reduce the effects of changing climate from livestock farming. The project is led by UW-Madison and involves researchers and extension staff from seven universities, five federal labs of the U.S. Departments of Agriculture and Energy, and the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy. [Link](#)

New research to study climate, weather impacts on livestock (Foodmate.com 5/8). The USDA has awarded \$19.5 million for research focusing on the impacts of climate change and weather variability on dairy and beef cattle. The University of Wisconsin received \$9.9 million to study the environmental impact of dairy production systems and develop farm-level management practices. Other partners in the dairy project include the University of Arkansas, Cornell University, the University of Michigan, North Carolina A&T University, Pennsylvania State University and the University of Washington, along with four USDA Agricultural Research Service laboratories, the U.S. Department of Energy and the industry-sponsored Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy. [Link](#)

The National Institute of Food and Agriculture Streamlines Grant Oversight and Tracking (Virtual Strategy Magazine 5/9). Barquin International announced today its partnership with the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), an agency of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), in the development of the recently-launched Research, Education, and Extension Project Online Reporting Tool (REEport). This integrated data collection, analysis and reporting application was successfully developed and deployed by NIFA to provide a singular, consistent method to support oversight and tracking of competitive and formula grant projects managed by the agency. [Link](#)

Grant aims to help dairy industry adapt (Wisconsin State Farmer 5/9). Dairy and soil scientists working at the University of Wisconsin-Madison received a nearly \$10 million U.S. Department of Agriculture grant this week to look for ways to help dairy producers adapt to changing climate and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack came to Madison Tuesday (May 7) to announce the five-year grant that is intended to find ways to identify dairy practices that minimize the production of greenhouse gases and make dairy production more resilient in the face of "more intense weather patterns" that are coming about as a result of climate change. The project will be led by UW-Madison scientists and includes researchers and extension staff at seven universities, five federal research labs, the U.S. Department of Energy, USDA and the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy – an offshoot of the national dairy checkoff program. [Link](#)

The Plight of the Honeybee (National Geographic 5/10). Bees are back in the news this spring, if not back in fields pollinating this summer's crops. When CCD appeared,

the USDA's Agricultural Research Service and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture joined forces to study and fight the assailant, but a half-dozen years later they still lack a smoking gun. Recent work reveals higher loads of pathogens in the guts of bees from collapsed colonies versus healthy ones—making viral infections a likely culprit. But this isn't a case of one cause, one effect. Bee expert Dennis vanEngelsdorp of the University of Maryland likens the situation to HIV/AIDS in humans. "You don't die of AIDS; you die of pneumonia or some other condition that hits when your immunity is down," he says. Today's bee mortalities may be behaving slightly differently. "But we're pretty sure in all these cases, diseases are the tipping point" after bees' immune systems are compromised. [Link](#)

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