USDA-FSA Emergency Assistance Program for Honey Bees and Livestock (ELAP)

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Executive Summary

The United States Department of Agriculture – Farm Service Agency (USDA-FSA) has programs that are dedicated to helping farmers, ranchers, and agricultural partners to keep farming and in business. I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to take part in an internship working at the Imperial County USDA-FSA department which is an administrative agency. Furthermore, I assisted with the implementation of agricultural policies, and assisted disaster related programs that helped to serve farmers, ranchers, and agricultural partners. According to FSA’s description, “Supplemental Disaster Assistance Program options greatly assist producers who have suffered losses from the unfortunate conditions of fire, flood, freeze, wind and severe drought.” Furthermore, a news release from the USDA stated, “the USDA has designated 56 of California’s 58 counties as natural disaster areas due to damages and losses caused by extreme drought.” Although Imperial County was not listed among the 56, it still qualifies for natural disaster assistance because it is contiguous with the surrounding counties.

Additionally, since the Imperial County is no stranger to the heat, our irrigation canals play a vital role in the distribution of water to farming lands. The water essentially comes from the Colorado River and there are four watersheds the Imperial County is associated with. The four watersheds are called Imperial Reservoir, Lower Colorado, Southern Mojave, and the Salton Sea. Although this project did not directly work with any watersheds, USDA-FSA offices work on administrative duties associated with helping farmers who are in need of assistance from disaster related causes.

Project Objectives

In March during the beginning of this internship, I was able to participate in the Agrilicious Research Field Day from Farm-to-Table. We learned about agricultural research of products that become ingredients from the farm field.
to the kitchen table, hosted by the University of California Desert Research and Extension Center (UCSREC). Also, we discovered the stages of planting, growing, and harvesting. It was a hybrid agricultural in-class and out-of-classroom educational learning experience for us. Additionally, we learned about the Top 10 agricultural commodities in the Imperial Valley which are cattle, leaf lettuce, alfalfa, head lettuce, broccoli, sugar beets, carrots, Bermuda grass, wheat, and Sudan grass.

In April, I had the opportunity to travel to the Cleveland National Forest which is part of United States Department of Agriculture - Forest Service (USDA-FS). We were able to overlook the Laguna Mountain recreation area mountaintop that was at least 6,000 ft in elevation. The park rangers introduced us to the USDA Pathways Program for students and recent graduates to federal careers which is part of USA/Jobs. During the presentations, a potential career pathway that caught my interest was employment with Public Affairs, or Park Rangers that help manage the national forest. Additionally, working with the Farm Service Agency has sparked my interest in working for the USDA because its vision is geared towards achieving an economically and environmentally sound future for American agriculture. I, too, value the importance of having our environment protected. Essentially, I am continually striving towards finding a place that serves the public sector.
The original goal of this project was to familiarize myself with the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP), but my interests soon lead towards the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-Raised Fish (ELAP) because we were working hard to analyze and complete documentation related to its disasters. ELAP is designed to help farmers who have experienced losses because of disease, adverse weather, wildfires or colony collapse disorder. ELAP is known to be an important safety net for key sectors in our agricultural community. The goal was to understand and help analyze documentation regarding ELAP. According to the USDA-FSA website it states, “ELAP was authorized by the 2014 Farm Bill, which builds on historic economic gains in rural America over the past five years” (News Release). In the Imperial County, there are no reported issues with wildfires nor are there any reported farmers who farm-raised fish currently, so no documentation was collected in those areas. Honeybee and livestock documentation was collected during the course of this internship, and I assisted in analyzing the data collected.

The honeybees that were eligible had to meet a certain criteria, in order to apply for ELAP. For example, they had to be bees that were housed in a managed hive and used for, pollination, honeybee breeding or honey production. According to USDA website, ineligible bees included “wild, feral honeybees, leaf cutter bees or other bee species that are not used for producing honey, pollinating or breeding honeybees.” Also, a direct result of loss must occur from disastrous weather conditions, or a loss condition such as colony collapse qualifies as eligible for ELAP payments.

*Colony collapse disorder (CCD)* is described as a phenomenon in which a honey bee colony abruptly disappears. Many theories have been stated as to why this occurs such as the usages of pesticides, infections with Varroa, air quality, cellular waves, malnutrition, or weather conditions. It is still unclear because there is no solid evidence as to what exactly causes CCD. It might be a mixture of different factors.

**Project Approach**

At first, I helped locate farm tracts by looking at the big original photocopy maps that were stored in the map shelf, and I assisted the program technicians with counting
row crops. Then, I was assigned to assist with ELAP by analyze documentation which includes calculating the total number of livestock losses, calculating the total number of bee losses, and calculating feed purchases.

Additional tasks performed:

- On a daily basis, I updated notices and amendments.
- Used problem solving skills to determine which sections of data would be applicable to the USDA-FSA programs.
- Assisted collecting documentation, making copies, and used good judgment to determine which types of honeybees and feed were reported.
- Farm programs were made for new program years, and some folders had to be pulled out so they could have changes made in them.
- Established several new excel sheets to organize the data that was given. This was done by categorizing types of bees, invoices, vendors that were associated with the farmers, and labeling the dates all in one page. Essentially, I made a summary of the documentation that was gathered.
- Assisted in calculating overall totals.
- Mailed out verification of clienteles AGI’s to IRS.

Project Outcomes

ELAP helps the agriculture community by providing aid to beekeepers when they are facing difficult times from lose of hives. Bee pollination is vitally important because crops such as berries, fruits, almonds, avocados and vegetables depend on the honeybees for pollination. It was mentioned that pollination is responsible for $15 billion in increased crop value each year, and demand for bees has continued to increase so that they may pollinate on certain crops. Although there is no agreed upon reason why colony collapse disorder occurs, researchers are continuing to look for the answer.

A lesson learned from this internship has been experiencing hands-on on what it is like to work for a federal government agency. Working with professionals in this field has helped mold me into becoming a better worker, student, and person. This opportunity
broadens my knowledge on different aspects of potential career paths available. I have absorbed vast amounts of information that I can take with me and apply what I have learned into other areas of future employment opportunities with the USDA. Working towards my Bachelors degree in Public Administration and working for the USDA-FSA has been beneficial; I can take aspects of both education and work and apply what I have learned in both areas interchangeably.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, this experiential learning internship has furthered my career goal of becoming a Public Administrator. I have developed a deeper interest in serving our public sector. Also, I now have a greater appreciation in protecting our natural resources, conserving our environment, and dedicating time into helping out the agricultural community. The focus of this internship was on assisting individuals who needed help when disaster strikes. ELAP provided the needed aid to ranchers, farmers, and agricultural partners. The experience I have gained working with the federal government agency USDA-FSA of Imperial County has been a positive one. Soon, I will have earned a Bachelor’s degree, and I have high hopes of completing the Masters program. The Watershed Management Experiential Learning Internship is the vital stepping stone needed to help achieve my long-term goals.

**Appendices**

Figure 1.
Figure 1 represents the difference in how the drought has negatively increased over one year. Tan represents moderate drought, orange represents severe drought, red represents extreme drought, and burgundy represents exceptional drought. The image above was gathered from the U.S Drought Monitor.

Figure 2.

Figure 2 (bottom left) shows Roberto Gonzalez, Abigail Campos, Rosalina Singh, and Jamie Duggan-Lara alongside with a group of students that participated in the “Agrilicious Research Field Day from Farm-to-Table.” This was part of the UC Cooperative Extension/Agriculture and Natural Resources with Farm Smart in Holtville, CA.
References


