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Disappearing bees threaten ice cream sellers

Premium maker Haagen-Dazs says vanishing bee colonies in the United States could mean fewer flavors and higher prices.

By **Parija B. Kavilanz**, CNNMoney.com senior writer
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NEW YORK (CNNMoney.com) -- Haagen-Dazs is warning that a creature as small as a honeybee could become a big problem for the premium ice cream maker's business.

At issue are the disappearing bee colonies in the United States, a situation that continues to mystify scientists and frighten foodmakers.

That's because, according to Haagen-Dazs, one-third of the U.S. food supply - including a variety of fruits, vegetables and even nuts - depends on pollination from bees.

Haagen-Dazs, which is owned by General Mills, said bees are actually responsible for 40% of its 60 flavors - such as strawberry, toasted pecan and banana split.

"These are among consumers' favorite flavors," said Katty Pien, brand director with Haagen-Dazs.

"We use 100% all natural ingredients like strawberries, raspberries and almonds which we get from California. The bee problem could badly hurt supply from the Pacific Northwest," Pien said

Pien said Haagen-Dazs is hoping scientists get a breakthrough in this mystery soon. Otherwise, she said, the company may have to "re-examine the flavors that we currently offers our customers."

"We have to ensure that we have enough supply to maintain our variety," she said.

Additionally, a supply shortage of key ingredients could push up retail prices for its products, she said.

Pien said the company is donating \$250,000 to both Pennsylvania State University and the University of California, Davis to fund research into the bee colony collapse disorder (CCD).

She said Haagen-Dazs is also rushing to raise consumer awareness about the problem by launching a new flavor this spring called Vanilla Honey Bee.

"We'll use part of the sales from this flavor help the honeybees," she said.

"This is the first time that Haagen-Dazs has adopted a cause like this," said Pien. "We are taking this very, very seriously because it impacts not just our brand but the entire food industry."

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Bees are responsible for 40% of Haagen-Dazs' flavors currently sold in the market.

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