

Government Relations Update



by Gene Brandi, ABF Vice President

ABF President Tim Tucker and I traveled to Capitol Hill in mid-June, where we, along with Fran Boyd of Meyers and Associates visited the offices of 12 senators and congressmen that hold important committee assignments with impact on the issues affecting our industry, as well as key members of the House Ag Committee staff. One of the more significant meetings we had while in the capitol was with Dr. Melinda Cep, assistant to USDA Deputy Secretary Krysta Harden. USDA Secretary Vilsack has asked Deputy Secretary Harden to head up the Pollinator Task Force recently established by the President's Executive Order. Dr. Cep has been asked by Secretary Harden to serve as her point person on all bee/pollinator matters.



Our message was simple but timely and important. We thanked the senators and congressmen (and their staffs) for their continued support of the US beekeeping industry and for their efforts to secure support of additional funding for USDA-ARS bee research for FY 2015. In addition, we asked that they do everything they can to ensure that the final appropriations bill that goes to the President's desk is accompanied by the strongest pro-bee/pollinator report language possible.

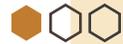
We expressed the need for continued research into bee health issues by ARS since the health of our bees remains a serious threat to the viability of the beekeeping industry. Most seemed to be sympathetic and understanding of the situation as we described the issues with exposure to certain pesticides, varroa

mites and lack of forage. We stressed these are the issues that must be addressed if we are to improve bee colony health. Not one, or two, but all three. We can report that at the time of our visits all said they believed that additional federal research was what was needed if we are going to improve the current state of honey bee colony health in America. Unfortunately FY 2015 appropriations are currently being held up by a great deal of controversy over the school lunch program and new USDA regulations, and this will likely not be settled until after the August congressional recess.

Congressmen Hastings (D-Florida) and Denham (R-California) have introduced the "Highways Bee Act" which directs the Secretary of Transportation to use existing authorities, programs and funding to encourage and facilitate integrated vegetation management and pollinator habitat efforts by willing state DOTs and other transportation right-of-way managers. It is estimated that there are at least 17 million acres of highway right of way throughout the USA (approximately as much that is in the Conservation Reserve Program), much of which could be managed in a manner that is more beneficial to pollinators. This can be accomplished by reduced mowing (let it bloom) and by planting native forbs where appropriate. We of course urged support of this bill at every office during our legislative trip and ask that you contact your local congressional office and urge them to support the Highways Bee Act and sign on as a co-sponsor of the legislation as well.

Following our return, we became concerned when two congressmen (whose offices we visited and who have always been strong supporters of additional federal research funding for bees) Rooney (R-Florida) and Valadao (R-California), published a press release stating that the problems with bee health are overblown. Their op-ed, entitled, "Cutting Through the Buzz, Pollinator Numbers Are Up," claimed that since the nation's summer bee colony numbers have remained fairly constant according to USDA estimates, all is fine in the bee industry. They minimize the significant losses many beekeepers have experienced in recent years saying that bees only live for five or six weeks anyway and colonies can quickly regenerate their populations. They claim that any bee health issues are related to varroa and that exposure to pesticides is near the bottom of the list of bee health

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problems. ABF President Tim Tucker has crafted an industry letter of response to Congressmen Rooney and Valadao highlighting the shortcomings and inaccuracies of their editorial. This response is scheduled to be a joint industry letter from both ABF and the AHPA.

Recently, ABF Past President George Hansen participated in a meeting of the National Corn Growers Association in Washington, DC. He relayed to them the serious issues bees are confronting in the corn belt. In addition to the corn dust issue he discussed with them the matter of contaminated pollen, and the continuing loss of pollinator habitat. It is important that ABF be at the table during events such as this, lest the corn growers and others think that all is OK with bees in the ever-expanding corn belt. I urge you to also attend and speak out at your local and

state grower organizations to make sure they know and understand the issues facing beekeepers in your state.

I want to also urge all ABF members to visit with their local congressional representatives while they are in their home districts during the August recess. It is a great opportunity to meet with them face to face and tell them about the issues you are facing as a beekeeper and convey the fact that the bee industry needs to remain sustainable in order to continue the important job of pollinating the nation's crops. If they have helped with bee issues in the past, be sure and thank them, and encourage their support of bee and pollinator issues. Remember that 2014 is an election year and they should be willing to hear from any constituent, so take advantage of the opportunity. Make sure they know they have beekeepers in their district!



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Candace Moss
Honey Buyer
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