

Government Relations Update



by Gene Brandi, ABF Vice President

Congress remains in summer recess as I write this report in late August, which is the safest time for the nation according to Will Rogers! Even though Congress is not currently in session, there is plenty going on within the government concerning the bee industry.

As a result of language in the latest Farm Bill, the USDA has requested that concerned parties submit comments pertaining to a possible Federal Standard of Identity for Honey by September 19. The comments received will be utilized in the preparation of a report from the Secretary of Agriculture to the Commissioner of Food and Drugs (FDA) describing how a Federal standard of identity for honey would be in the interest of consumers, the honey industry and U.S. agriculture. The ABF played a major role in submitting a petition to the FDA in 2006 requesting that such a standard for honey be established. The petitioners contended “the proposed standard will promote honesty and fair dealing not only in the interest of consumers, but in the interest of the honey industry as well.” The petitioners also stated that “a compositional standard for honey will serve as a tool to help combat the economic adulteration of honey.” The ABF is currently drafting comments for submission to the USDA to be included in the official record. It is our hope that the report from USDA will finally get FDA to take action on this issue.

There has been a troubling turn of events recently at the Beltsville USDA Bee Research facility. Dr. Jeff Pettis was removed from his position as lab leader and the ABF is extremely concerned with this action. Dr. Pettis has been an exemplary lab leader while he has conducted excellent research throughout his tenure as lab leader. ABF Past President, Dave Hackenberg, attended a meeting with ARS officials to discuss the situation and express our concerns about this decision. A joint letter from ABF and AHPA has been sent to US Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack, expressing our disappointment about this action, including a request that this action be reconsidered.

The USDA has sent out invitations to their Forage and Nutrition Summit which will be held in Alexandria, Virginia on October 20-21. ABF President, Tim Tucker, and I plan to attend this event as well as ABF Past Presidents, Zac Browning and George Hansen. The North American Pollinator Protection Campaign (NAPPC) annual meeting will be held October 21-23, in the Washington, D.C. area immediately following the forage summit. We



certainly hope that both meetings will be substantive and provide genuine forage improvement and protection for pollinators. We plan to stress that any improvements in bee forage should be in safe areas which are free of pesticide residues in order for them to be truly beneficial for pollinators.

In another forage related issue, Zac Browning has been leading discussions regarding the seed mixes used on CRP lands, on behalf of the ABF, with the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The majority of CRP acreage is in the upper Midwest and, while it would be extremely beneficial for honey bees if white and yellow sweet clover were included in the mix, so far they are not. Apparently there are some who classify these great honey plants as non-native invasive weeds and do not want them propagated on CRP lands. Although it has been frustrating, ABF will continue to push for their inclusion in these seed mixes.

The Crop Protection Industry, better known as the pesticide industry, has been pushing the media and Congress with the message that the problems with bee health are the result of varroa mites and lack of good forage, but not pesticides. The op-ed in Roll Call by Congressmen Rooney and Valadao, which I mentioned in the previous ABF Newsletter, is an example of this line of thinking. There is general consensus among most in the bee industry that it is unrealistic to exclude pesticides from the list of issues which are negatively impacting bee health. The ABF and AHPA responded directly to the two Congressmen and plan to submit a joint op-ed of our own as well. We also continue to monitor for legislation that might be introduced which could negatively impact the bee industry with regard to pesticides.