

The 2017 ABF Legislative Priorities

Support of Federal Strategy - In 2015, the previous administration, concerned with the continuing and alarming decline in U.S. honey bee health, issued “The National Strategy to Promote the Health of Honey Bees and Other Pollinators”. The ABF is urging that EPA, USDA, and other Federal Agencies enhance their efforts to improve the plight of honey bees to meet the goals of the Federal Strategy.

Funding for Research – There is no question that the bee industry continues to sustain major colony losses throughout the country. We will continue to work with Congress to obtain the necessary appropriations to continue vital research into the many problems that have negatively impacted honey bee health. In addition to USDA-ARS, we will work with other public and private research institutions that can provide meaningful research opportunities for our industry.

Maintaining ARS Lab Funding – The proposed budget cuts to research programs threaten to reduce USDA-ARS funding. The ABF will continue to urge USDA-ARS to fully fund honey bee research facilities to maintain and enhance their important research efforts. We will continue to work with ARS and urge them to focus their research efforts upon the most serious issues facing the bee industry.

Protecting our Honey Market – There is no question that the world honey market has been in a downward spiral for the past two years. The fact that the U.S. honey market in 2016 consisted of only 20% domestic and 80% imported honey is a serious concern for beekeepers throughout the nation. Honey adulteration with less expensive sweeteners is suspected to be a factor in the increased supply of honey worldwide. The ABF along with other industry groups have formed a “Honey Integrity Task Force” that is working on protecting our honey market from these issues.

The ABF will continue to propose a national honey standard that we would like to see adopted. A national standard of identity would give state and federal officials a better tool that would be used to stop those who are adding cheaper sweeteners to honey.

FDA Labeling – The new FDA ruling regarding “Added Sugars” on the nutritional label will potentially have a negative impact on the pure image of honey. ABF submitted comments to the official FDA docket and will continue to have discussions with FDA regarding this important issue.

The country of origin labeling for honey is confusing and sometimes deceptive. ABF will work with FDA to establish mandatory and accurate country of origin labeling regulations.

Pesticides – We are losing our bees at unsustainable rates, and exposure to certain pesticides continues to play a major role in colony decline. The fact that neonicotinoids continue to be implicated in honey bee losses during corn planting in the US and Canada

is a reminder that this is an area that cannot be overlooked. Research has shown that exposure to even low levels of certain neonics can cause several bee health issues including increased susceptibility to diseases. ABF continues to urge that EPA change the bee hazard warnings on these product labels to eliminate “exemptions” which allow their use on blooming plants.

The fact that many pesticides of all types continue to have negative effects on honey bees throughout the country is of extreme concern to the ABF. Untested tank mixes of various products, including several fungicides and insect growth regulators applied to almonds and a variety of crops should be reevaluated by EPA as their negative effects on honey bee colonies can be substantial. The ABF, on its own and with the assistance of the National Honey Bee Advisory Board (NHBAB) has developed a working relationship with the EPA as a stakeholder in the effort to revise registration and labeling of pesticides. The incident reporting system and the policing of compliance issues are broken. ABF leaders and several members have already devoted considerable time and effort toward these issues in recent years but there is a great deal more work which must be done if real progress is to be made in protecting honey bees from the negative effects of pesticides. In that regard, we have requested that USDA and EPA convene a Pesticide (Crop Protection) Summit to bring these issues to the table and help facilitate their resolution.

We are concerned that proposed “Managed Pollinator Protection Plans” (MP3’s) being developed in many states are viewed by some as “the answer” to reducing honey bee exposure to harmful pesticides. While we agree that MP3’s can help to increase communication between pesticide applicators and beekeepers, fundamental pollinator protection is based upon the enforcement of clear, effective bee hazard language on pesticide labels which prohibits harmful products from being applied to plants which bloom.

Promoting and Protecting Honey Bee Habitat – Habitat loss is one of the most severe threats to honey bee health. It is one that all stakeholders can agree needs focus, as access to good clean forage is the most basic and fundamental requirement in sustaining healthy hives. As more research is published about the negative effects of agricultural land use change on soil, water, wildlife, climate and pollinators, the opportunity to garner support for establishing habitat from many stakeholders continues to increase.

We are committed to working with government agencies, agriculture allies and other stakeholders to develop policies and programs to enhance, protect, expand, and provide access to suitable pollinator habitat.

The ABF and the AHPA have recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the USDA-NRCS and FSA, which allows for increased involvement in developing and managing USDA programs that impact pollinators on the landscape.

As part of the 2018 Farm Bill effort, we will seek to keep honey bees a top priority for all USDA conservation efforts and work for the expansion of acreage in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

Crop Insurance and ELAP – The ABF will continue to work for USDA disaster programs to be more available to beekeepers and to increase the funding for these programs and make them permanent. These programs need to allow for the management of risk without opening the door to fraud.

H-2A Labor Programs – Temporary employment of foreign workers in the United States continues to be an issue for the honey industry. The lack of employees willing to work in this industry is critical. The benefits that the H-2A program brings to beekeepers are substantial. The ABF is committed to working with the Federal Government along with the National Council of Agricultural Employers (NCAE) for a continuance of the H-2A program and will pursue communication of urgency to focus on the needs of the beekeeping industry.

Transportation – Safe and efficient transportation of bee hives throughout the US is essential to beekeepers as well as American agriculture. The “hours of service” limitations make it extremely difficult to transport bees legally during longer daylight hours. The ABF plans to petition the USDOT for a limited exemption from these strict “hours of service” limitations for transporting bees during the months of the year with longer daylight hours.