

Government Relations Update



by Gene Brandi, ABF Vice President

As mentioned in my vice president's update, I attended a meeting with EPA officials in late March to discuss the issues surrounding the use of fungicides and insect growth regulators on blooming almonds. One week later, I met with Jim Jones, EPA Assistant Administrator, and Tom Moriarty, leader of EPA's pollinator protection team, in order to further discuss this and other bee/pesticide issues. They confirmed that it is not likely there will be any bee hazard warnings added to the labels of fungicides or insect growth regulators prior to next almond bloom in February 2015. According to Mr. Jones and Mr. Moriarty, the EPA is now using enhanced risk assessment on new products, which would include assessing products for their potential to damage brood. Unfortunately, there is no testing of tank mixes, which is often the manner by which bees are exposed to these products in the field. Products currently on the market are only scheduled for enhanced risk assessment when they are reevaluated several years down the road or if new uses are requested by registrants and data exist to support this assessment.

We also discussed the new "pollinator protection" label language recently adopted by EPA for use on neonicotinoid pesticides, which was intended to be harmonized for use on other pesticide chemistries which are also highly toxic to bees. ABF and others in the bee industry have been critical of this new language as it contains a number of exemptions or loopholes which would actually result in decreased pollinator protection. It was encouraging to hear Mr. Jones admit that EPA "missed the mark" with this attempt to improve pollinator protection from pesticides and is willing to revisit the issue. This is certainly welcome news and ABF willing to work with EPA in order to genuinely improve pollinator protection language on pesticide labels at any time.

In other Washington news, ABF and AHPA submitted joint testimony to the House Appropriations Committee (House Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, FDA, and related agencies) pertaining to the FY 2015 budget. Strong support of the President's FY 2015 budget proposal was communicated in this joint testimony to the committee, including a \$25 million appropriation for a National Institutes of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) Pollination and Pollinator Health Institute; a \$4 million increase in ARS funding for honey bee research within crop production funds; and a \$2 million increase in funding for NASS surveys and studies.

The ABF was invited to a White House Pollinator Stakeholder meeting in early May in order to present our pollinator health concerns to the Executive branch. ABF President Tim Tucker and several others, including ABF Past President Zac Browning (representing Project Apis m), took advantage of this great opportunity by attending and communicating with representatives of the Executive Office of the President. The ABF also submitted joint comments to the Executive Office with AHPA as a follow up to the Pollinator Stakeholder Meeting.



A brief summary of those comments include:

1. Support for educational campaigns, training materials, and programs which can be developed and implemented to minimize the misuse and misapplication of pesticides.
2. Support for ongoing pollinator research at USDA which should focus on more sustainable technologies for crop protection; more effective treatments for honey bee pests and pathogens; geographic diversification of ARS laboratory locations; and more field studies of managed pollinators throughout the year.
3. Better guidance on stewardship of conservation land; uniform national policies on the use of public lands; and a collaborative effort by private land owners could result in substantially better forage for pollinators as more land is converted to agricultural uses.
4. EPA should better protect all pollinator species by taking actions to minimize exposure to pesticides while ensuring sufficient crop protection.

It is encouraging to see that there is a great deal of concern for pollinator health issues in the Executive Office.