

# Government Relations Update



by Tim Tucker, ABF Vice President

As I look back, it seems as though the past year has just flown by, much like the past decade, actually. Our recent meeting in Hershey didn't seem an entire year removed from Las Vegas and I keep feeling like someone is speeding up the clock on me. Maybe it's age or perhaps it's the speed at which things seem to be coming at you today, but something is making the years go faster and faster. There is little time, it seems, to get all of the things addressed that we need to and that is certainly the case with issues on the national level.

In talking with ABF President George Hansen the other day we were both amazed at how much was on the ABF's agenda this year. Some of these items are issues that are internal and deal with elections and bylaws and planning for upcoming conferences the next few years. There is no shortage of challenges that we face to keep things running smoothly while ensuring that our organization is moving in the right direction.

One of the big challenges that we continue to face is that our interests as an industry are greatly affected not only by state and local issues, but by issues of a larger stature that take place on a national and now international level. One of the matters being investigated currently is the question of whether or not the American beekeeping industry is interested and capable of hosting an Apimondia Congress here in the United States in six years. It is an undertaking that captured the attention of several dozen people who attended the ABF annual conference in January. A task force was formed to explore the feasibility of bringing an Apimondia to the United States. The costs of this will be large and it will take the entire industry working together with sponsors from outside of our industry (likely) to find the necessary funding. Securing funding is always the challenge for industry groups and the ABF is no different.

Our interests are being challenged on a daily basis at one level or another and it seems as though remedial efforts take many times the effort to accomplish. As things move slower at the national level they become proportionately more expensive and difficult to ensure that our interests are represented. This year will be no different and there is more on the table than ever. It seems that the current Congress is spectacularly adept at not getting things done. Gridlock and a split Congress have contributed to less getting done than at any time in the past 50 or more years. The Farm Bill has expired and they very nearly let

the Highway Bill expire, which would have been a disaster. These issues mean more intensive work to address our interests in Washington and more time dedicated to the process. We still have many of the same issues to address we had last year and the list is growing.

- **Funding for CCD Research** – Funding for research has been authorized but not fully appropriated, so we need to continue to push for funds to further research in this area in an attempt to find solutions.
- **Pesticide Poisoning Issues** – In the coming years this issue will take a huge investment of time to help mitigate the exposure that our bees have working in the agriculturally intensive areas of our country. We continue to push for better testing of pesticides before they are brought to the market. It will take much effort in working with the EPA to bring the mandate they have to “do no harm” to the environment and our bees to provide workable solutions for the food production industry and the beekeeping industry. We are currently working with several groups to ensure that this year's corn planting season is as safe as we can make it for our bees. This one issue may take several years to arrive at risk mitigation measures that will prove out in better results when it comes to protecting our bees.
- **Pollinator Habitat** – There is no doubt that our acres of forage for honey production are shrinking. This is a huge problem for the long-term survival of our industry. Efforts to make CRP lands more assessable for bees and more bee-friendly when seeding these acres is critical. There is little doubt that if nothing is done we will simply be producing less honey in the future and that is not good for anyone.
- **Maintaining Funding for ARS Labs** – Weslaco has been deleted from the list of research facilities and the current mood in Washington is to cut spending. While there is no current drive to close other bee research facilities, it may just be a matter of time before the cost cutting knife may consider options that we would find deleterious to beekeeping and agriculture in general.

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- **Protecting Honey's Untarnished Image** – Our market is under siege from different perspectives and adulteration issues are at the forefront of our push to establish a Standard of Identity (SOI) for honey on a national level that will protect our business. If we continue to let honey imposters steal our market we will have difficulty surviving.
- **Disaster Programs, Crop Insurance and H2A Labor Programs** – We continue to work to make sure that these programs are available and easily assessable to the industry. If we are to have these programs continue on and provide workable options we have to continue to press for our interests.

In the past we have passed a pledge sheet at the conference during the annual business meeting. One of the problems with this is that we felt it may have caused many not to attend. The past two years we have chosen not to do this and that puts us in a hole without any obvious way to resolve the funding of our legislative issues. These trips

to Washington are expensive and maintaining a presence there is costly, as well.

So, it is a yearly and almost monthly effort that we remind all of our members that these issues affect us all, whether we have one hive or 10,000 hives. While we have received pledges during January for over \$8,000 and auction items sold during the annual conference raised a significant amount, we are still around \$17,000 behind our budget for legislative issues for this fiscal year. Your past donations to the ABF Legislative Fund have been greatly appreciated and they have been spent as efficiently as possible. Many of these trips to Washington as of late have been funded out of pocket individually by our representatives and it is difficult to continue to ask those same people to keep shouldering the costs. We need your help and would appreciate any amount that you are able to contribute. Thank you in advance for your donation to the ABF Legislative Fund (you can easily donate online on the ABF website at [www.abfnet.org](http://www.abfnet.org)) and your continued support of these key efforts on behalf of our industry.



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companies making significant contributions to help “solve” our problems. What are we to make of that? As we move into our next 70 years, how do we stay responsive to our changing membership? Who will be our friends and collaborators? What does the American Honey Queen program look like in the middle of the 21st century? Can we maintain and fund a viable legislative effort, as our membership leans so heavily to sideliners? What relevant information can we get to our membership and in what way? Where will ABF leadership come from? And, can we remain a federation, the big tent, or will the fracturing micro interests of this Internet age pull us apart again and again? Those are the questions that will define the next 70 years.

In a society described by Robert Putnam in his book *Bowling Alone*, organizations are dwindling as people are finding more connectedness with their TV than with actual relationships with like-minded people. From bowling leagues to PTAs, organizations are losing their members. If we are going to continue to grow, the ABF must remain relevant and connected to beekeepers and those in the industry. These relations, this connectedness will determine whether the ABF, both at a local as well as a national level, can meet the challenges of our problems.

## Friends of the Bee Fund Contributions

The following individuals contributed to the Friends of the Bee Fund during the months of January 2013. These donations enable us to fund educational programs and services that will benefit ABF members and the American beekeeping industry.

- Robert Allers, Va.
- Rob Buhmann, Mont.
- Jimmy Carmack, Ala.
- Linda Kaye Carmack, Ala.
- William Montgomery, Texas
- Judith Benoit Pugh and Russ Pugh, Calif.  
*(In memory of Paul L. Allers)*

