

Government Relations Report

by: Gene Brandi
ABF President

ABF immediate Past President, Tim Tucker, and I just returned from a trip to Washington, D.C., where we, along with Fran Boyd of Meyers and Associates, visited with various federal officials. The trip was scheduled to coincide with the EPA Pesticide Program Dialog Committee meeting, which Tim and I both wanted to attend.

Our first visit was to Capitol Hill where we met with more than a dozen staff members of the Congressional "Pollinator Caucus" who have been very helpful in pushing pollinator-related issues through the House. Much of our discussions revolved around the recently-released winter and annual loss numbers from the Bee Informed Partnership. Approximately 28% winter losses and more than 44% annual losses represent an increase over last year's numbers and are cause for great concern. The beekeeping industry cannot continue to experience such substantial losses and remain sustainable. We stressed the need for continued research on the issues impacting the health of honey bees, increased access to public lands for apiary locations, as well as the need for additional efforts by EPA to better protect bees from pesticide exposure.

We met with two USDA Senior Advisors to the Secretary of Agriculture, Jeff Eschmeyer and Doug McKalip. Tim, Fran and I expressed the need for continued funding of ARS research efforts, and we look forward to contributions from the new ARS facility at the University of California, Davis, which is not yet staffed. The benefits of increased honey bee access to federal lands administered by USDA agencies was also stressed. We reminded them that the focus of the Federal Task Force Report, released a year ago, was an "all hands on deck" effort by federal agencies to reduce pollinator decline. The 2016 ELAP program was discussed, and we conveyed our opinion that the "normal" colony loss rate should remain at 15%, which is in line with the goals of the Federal Task Force. There was also a meeting that Fran attended, with Dr. Ann Bartuska, USDA Deputy Under Secretary for Research, to discuss a proposal to evaluate the impact of horticultural pest management practices on commercially-managed honey bee colonies in diverse agro-ecosystems on an annual basis.

Tim, Fran and I also met with several representatives from EPA's Office of Pesticide Programs to discuss an array of issues surrounding bees and pesticides. We expressed our concerns about the shortcomings we see in pesticide labeling, the Managed Pollinator Protection Programs (MP3s), the problems with Insect Growth Regulators and tank mixes with fungicides during pollination of almonds and other crops, neonics and other issues. We continue



to stress the ABF position that all bees need to be protected from pesticide exposure all the time, not only when they are being paid to pollinate a particular crop.

Tim and I appreciated the opportunity to meet with EPA in conjunction with AHPA Board members in a separate meeting where we discussed our jointly-submitted comments on EPA's proposal to mitigate pesticide exposure to bees, our recently-submitted comments on the Imidacloprid Pollinator Risk Assessment, as well as other issues. Again, the recently announced winter and annual rates of honey bee colony loss were a reason for concern that more needs to be done to protect bees from pesticide exposure. During our meeting we were told of the EPA proposal to register sulfoxaflor on a limited basis for crops that are not bee attractive. The ABF and AHPA will review the proposal and likely submit comments during the announced 30-day comment period.

The EPA Pesticide Program Dialog Committee meeting was very interesting. The PPDC comprises about 40 individuals from agriculture, environmental, academic, chemical industry and other groups. Steve Coy of Mississippi is the only beekeeper on the PPDC, and he represented the bee industry well. It was disappointing that the Pollinator Work Group, within the PPDC, is being discontinued. Given the losses the bee industry continues to experience, it is clear that there is still a great deal of work to be done with pesticide exposure and its effects on bees.