

Government Relations Report

by: Gene Brandi
ABF President

MP3 Symposium

ABF Board members Joan Gunter, Bob Sears, Past President George Hansen, and I attended a symposium in Washington, D.C., on March 10-11 to discuss the development of Managed Pollinator Protection Plans (MP3's). The meeting, which was sponsored by EPA, USDA, NASDA (National Association of State Departments of Agriculture), and the Honey Bee Health Coalition, was designed to provide the tools, insights and relationships necessary for state, tribal, and other stakeholders to pursue the development of MP3 plans effectively and efficiently.

MP3 plans, as discussed at the symposium, are voluntary and proposed as a means of opening lines of communication between beekeepers and growers and/or pesticide applicators. Increased communication can be beneficial, but it is only the first step in helping to improve the situation, as communication alone will not necessarily decrease the impact of pesticide exposure to bees and other pollinators. The ABF position, which I stressed, is that clear, enforceable pesticide label language is the best means of protecting bees from pesticides. Of course the pesticide label language must be based upon accurate, comprehensive risk assessment of the pesticide products.

EPA's suggestion that MP3's can provide notification to beekeepers, so that bees can be removed from areas where pesticides will be applied, is not a practical solution to mitigate the issues honey bees and other pollinators encounter with pesticide exposure. One government speaker dispelled this concept when he stated that MP3 plans are not a "get out of jail free" card for pesticide applicators! Clearly, continual moving of honey bees away from areas where pesticides are applied is neither a practical nor sustainable means of protecting them on a broad scale, given the relative ubiquity of pesticide applications in many parts of the country.

It was mentioned that there are several managed pollinators besides honey bees including leaf cutter bees, alkali bees, blue orchard bees, bumblebees, and others. A number of attendees stressed the fact that all pollinators need protection from pesticide exposure and most of them cannot be moved. It was evident that many attendees did not have an understanding or appreciation of the problems bees and other pollinators face with exposure to pesticides. One state representative told me that beekeepers surveyed in his state place pesticides at the bottom of their list of problems. Knowing that particular state and its pesticide problems, I wonder which beekeepers participated in the survey. Even though this symposium was convened in order to specifically discuss protecting bees from pesticides, frequent mentions of varroa and bee management issues, and comments that beekeepers just need more education, were prevalent amongst some speakers and others with whom I spoke in the hallways between sessions. I stressed that beekeepers are just like farmers in many ways, since we must contend with a multitude of issues as we endeavor to maintain the health of our bees, but certainly exposure to pesticides is one of the most serious issues we face.

There are many challenges to the possible success of MP3 plans, not the least of which is that voluntary programs are impossible to enforce. The fact that a group of more than 150 people gathered to discuss protecting bees from pesticides is positive, irrespective of the fact that some tried to deflect the issue. I truly hope that symposium attendees were



enlightened by the beekeepers in attendance who have been dealing with pesticide issues for many, many years.

EPA Imidacloprid Comments

The comment period for EPA's Preliminary Pollinator Risk Assessment for Imidacloprid has been extended until April 14. The ABF continues to develop comments, which we will submit jointly with the American Honey Producers Association. EPA encourages stakeholders and interested members of the public to review the risk assessment and related documents and submit comments to the docket at www.regulations.gov/#:docketDetail;D=EPA-HQ-OPP-2008-0844. According to EPA, all comments submitted to the docket will be considered in the final risk assessment.

GMO Labeling

Genetically modified organisms (GMO's) have been in the news lately as the Vermont law, which requires that products containing genetically engineered ingredients be labeled, is scheduled to become effective on July 1, 2016. In an effort to negate this law and prevent other states from enacting similar legislation, a bill was introduced in the U.S. Senate that would have called for voluntary disclosure of GMO ingredients nationally, while prohibiting states from enacting their own GMO labeling requirements. This bill failed to garner support and died in the Senate. Discussions surrounding the possibility of another Senate bill that could head off the implementation of the Vermont law before July 1 are ongoing. It is clear that the majority of consumers want to know whether or not the foods they buy contain genetically engineered ingredients. The debate continues as to whether or not GMO labeling of foods will be required nationally or allowed on a state-by-state basis. The good news is that, according to the European Union, Australia, several other countries, and the state of Vermont, honey is a non-GMO food as defined by their adopted standards.