

Government Relations Report

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ABF Vice President



ABF President Gene Brandi and I made a visit to Washington, D.C., on June 14th and 15th. We were joined by Fran Boyd of Meyers and Associates. We visited with several federal officials including staff members of the “Pollinator Caucus” and the FDA/CVM (Center for Veterinary Medicine).

Our first meeting was with FDA/CVM where we met with Dr. William Flynn, DVM, MS; Dr. Margaret Oeller, DVM; Dr. Amber McCoig, DVM as well as teleconferencing with Dr. Mike Murphy, DVM. We reiterated our concerns about the decline in bee populations and the absolute importance of bees to our country’s agriculture industry. About one third of the food we eat is dependent on pollinators, and almost 90% of all commercial beehives are brought in to pollinate almonds every year.

We brought up our concerns over the new “Veterinary Feed Directive.” The FDA has taken steps to change how antibiotics are used in the food industry. The agency would like to eliminate the use of these drugs for production purposes. These would include promoting growth and increasing feed efficiency. The FDA will also bring the other uses of these antibiotics under the supervision of a licensed veterinarian. This includes bees!

As of December 31st, 2016, you will need a valid prescription from a state-licensed veterinarian to purchase and administer any antibiotic to your bees. Getting a veterinarian to check your bees before giving you a prescription seems like an awfully big hurdle to jump over. There are not many (if any at all) veterinarians that are knowledgeable about bee diseases. The CVM is planning to give a training course on bee diseases at their next national conference.

Dr. Flynn recommended that beekeepers have a valid client-patient relationship with a state-licensed veterinarian. This should enable beekeepers to receive a prescription after describing their methods of treatment with antibiotics. Prescriptions will be valid for 6 months allowing beekeepers to receive a 6-month supply of the antibiotic that they have been using in the past. These prescriptions will be

valid for administering in other states if the bees are moved across state lines. The FDA/CVM seems very interested in working with our industry as much as possible to make this transition work for all involved.

We have requested that a representative from the FDA/CVM attend the North American Beekeeping Conference in Galveston, Texas, this January to explain how the new Veterinary Feed Directive will affect beekeepers. We would like this to take place during a general session with a question-and-answer period included. This should be a very well-attended presentation.

We also met with Jeff Eschmeyer, the Senior Advisor to the Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack. We discussed honey as a non-GMO product and the Vermont GMO labeling law. We reiterated the importance of the President’s Memorandum on “Creating a Federal Strategy to Promote the Health of Honey Bees and other Pollinators” and stated our concern for its survival with the transition to a new administration.

Our visit also included meetings with staff members from the “Pollinator Caucus.” We again emphasized our concern about the decline in bee population stating that a 40% annual loss cannot be sustained by beekeepers. Throughout our visit we echoed our concern regarding some beekeepers being asked to remove their bees from federal land. We continue to encourage land management agencies to follow the recommendations of the President’s Memorandum, to substantially expand pollinator habitat on federal lands, although the recommendations don’t always reach the land manager level. These lands seem to be managed from the bottom up making it difficult for everyone to be on the same page.

The week following our visit was National Pollinator Week. There was a panel discussion concerning pollinator health issues as well as many other activities throughout Washington, D.C. Gene and I are hoping to schedule next year’s visit to coincide with this event.