

Government Relations Report

by: Gene Brandi
ABF Vice President



Re: ABF Legislative Fund Appeal

Dear ABF Member,

The American Beekeeping Federation continues to work in Washington D.C. and around the country to further the legislative and regulatory related priorities important to ABF members. ABF President, Tim Tucker, and ABF Vice President, Gene Brandi, have plans to visit Washington, D.C. very soon in order to work with legislators and regulators to advance the issues important to ABF members.

The legislative priorities of the ABF in 2015 include:

- **Funding for Research.** There is no question that the bee industry continues to sustain major colony losses throughout the country. We will continue to work with Congress in an effort to obtain the necessary appropriations so that vital research into the many problems which negatively impact honey bee health can continue. In addition to USDA-ARS, we plan to work with other public and private research sources that can provide meaningful research opportunities for our industry.
- **Maintaining ARS Lab Funding.** The ABF continues to urge that USDA-ARS honey bee research facilities be fully funded in order to maintain and enhance their research efforts. We are excited to hear that USDA-ARS has plans to open a new honey bee research facility in Davis, California which is scheduled to be up and running in 2016.
- **Protecting our Honey Market.** There continues to be a great deal of discussion concerning the state of our honey market. The discussions come down to two priorities: 1) establishing a national standard of identity for honey; and 2) stopping illegal imports, particularly transshipment of Chinese honey through intermediary countries. We are being told that our honey market is in precarious shape. We need to take strong steps to shore it up.

The FDA has thus far refused work on the honey standard of identity submitted by the industry. Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack sent FDA a summary of comments received from concerned industry members regarding the need for a standard of identity for honey, but so far there is still no indication that FDA intends to act upon these recommendations. A standard of identity would give state and federal enforcement officials a better tool to use to stop those who are adding cheaper sweeteners to our honey. In addition, several persons accused of being involved in honey transshipment have been arrested and convicted. The ABF, along with representatives other honey industry groups, has developed a modified proposal for a national honey standard that we would like to see adopted by FDA.

- **Pesticides.** We are losing our bees at unsustainable rates, and it is increasingly clear that pesticides play a major role in colony decline. The verification that neonicotinoids have been implicated in honey bee losses during corn planting in the US and Canada is a reminder that this is an area that cannot be overlooked, no matter the pushback from entities with vested interests. The fact that neonicotinoids and other pesticides applied to a variety of crops continue to have negative effects on honey bees throughout the country is of extreme concern to the ABF. The ABF, on its own and with the National Honey Bee Advisory Board (NHBAB) have developed a working relationship with the EPA as a stakeholder in the efforts to revise registration and labeling of pesticides. It is clear that the incident reporting system and the policing of compliance issues are broken. ABF leaders and members have already devoted considerable time and effort toward these issues in recent years but there is a great deal more work which must be done if real progress is to be made in protecting honey bees from the negative effects of pesticides. We are concerned that proposed "State Programs for the Protection of Bees" may exacerbate rather than improve the situation, and have been participating in discussions about such programs for the past several months.
- **Promoting and Protecting Honey Bee Habitat.** Lack of sufficient clean foraging resources for honey bees in many parts of the country is having a profoundly negative effect on hive health and productivity. We are committed to working with government agencies, agriculture allies, and other stakeholders to develop policies and programs to enhance, protect, expand, and provide access to suitable pollinator habitat. There are several new initiatives which will enhance forage for pollinators in many parts of the country and ABF is supportive of these efforts. One great example is the new joint forage/habitat project in the upper Mid-West with Pheasants Forever, Project Apis-M, and Browning Honey Farm.
- **Crop Insurance, ELAP, and H-2A Labor Programs.** The ABF continues to work for USDA disaster programs to be more available to beekeepers, and to make funding of these programs permanent. We need programs that allow for the management of risk without opening the door to fraud. The beekeeping industry's need for legal laborers requires an H-2A labor program

that works. In addition, the ABF continues to be an active member of the agriculture labor coalition working on meaningful immigration reform. These are difficult issues and require our input and consistent voice to resolve.

- **Transportation Issues.** We are continuing to work on a waiver/exemption from additional hours of service limitations for drivers of trucks who haul bees. The ABF co-signed a letter along with California Farm Bureau requesting such a waiver/exemption, and submitted comments during the official comment period as well. This is a bee health issue which we believe can be addressed without adversely impacting traffic safety.

In order to carry out these ABF objectives, it is necessary that your ABF representatives travel to Washington periodically. This is always an expensive endeavor as airline fares keep increasing and hotel rates in Washington are some of the highest in the nation. The services of Meyers and Associates are necessary to assist the ABF with legislative and government relations efforts in Washington and their fees must be paid on a regular basis. We must have them working for us on the scene, in order to keep us abreast of anything that may impact the beekeeping industry.

The bottom line is that the ABF cannot achieve the goals set by the membership without the financial resources to get the job done and, at this time, we are again well behind budget in the ABF Legislative Fund. Your commitment to help in these efforts is essential to their success. We can assure you that your contributions to the ABF

Legislative Fund are spent carefully and with full consideration of how important this work is for you, the ABF members. Your Legislative Fund donations are very much appreciated and are an investment in the future of your business, as well as the bee industry as a whole. You can easily donate online at www.abfnet.org (click on the "Donate to the ABF" link on the home page), or send a check to the ABF office at the letterhead address. If you have any questions, please call our ABF office at 404.760.2875.

While your contributions are essential to the success of ABF efforts, there is something else just as important - maybe more important at times. We need you to keep in contact with your members of Congress, both your representative and your state's two senators. They and their staff members need to be aware of your beekeeping activities and of our industry's needs - and they need to hear this from you. There is helpful information in this newsletter that can assist you when contacting your Congressional representatives and Senators.

There is a role for each of us, and together we can accomplish a great deal. As we progress throughout the year, it is our intention to keep you informed with the latest developments and needs in the legislative area that are critical to our industry. Please let us know how we can better serve you and all ABF members.

Gene Brandi, Chairman
ABF Legislative Committee

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