

# Government Relations Report

by: *Tim May*  
ABF Vice President

In this issue, I'd like to update everyone on what the ABF did regarding government issues that involve the beekeeping industry in 2016, as well as what we will be doing in the future.

Back in March, Gene Brandi, Joan Gunter, Bob Sears and George Hansen attended the Managed Pollinator Protection Plan (MP3) symposium in Washington, D.C. The symposium was sponsored by EPA, USDA, NASDA and the Honey Bee Health Coalition. During the meeting, ABF stressed that enforceable pesticide label language is currently the best means for protecting pollinators from pesticides and that removing bees prior to pesticide application is not a practical method. ABF emphasized that the success of MP3s relies on voluntary participation and is impossible to enforce.

In May, Gene and Tim Tucker were in Washington for the EPA's Pesticide Program Dialog Committee meeting (PPDC). Also during that trip, they met with staff members of the congressional pollinator caucus. The discussion revolved around the annual loss reports and the fact that annual losses of 44% are not sustainable for the industry.

They also met with the USDA secretary's senior advisors and stressed the need for continued funding of USDA-ARS research, and they met with the EPA to discuss concerns regarding pesticide label language and the effectiveness of MP3s.

In June, Gene and I returned to Washington and were joined by Fran Boyd of Meyers and Associates. We met with FDA/CVM (Center for Veterinarian Medicine) and discussed the new Veterinary Feed Directive. We expressed our concerns with the effect the ruling will have on our industry. They assured us that they would work with us to make this an easy transition for beekeepers.

We also met with USDA Secretary Vilsack's senior advisor Jeff Eshmeyer and discussed honey as a non-GMO product and the Vermont GMO labeling law. We stressed the importance of President Obama's memorandum directing an interagency Task Force to create a Strategy to Promote the Health of Honey Bees and other pollinators. Under the leadership of EPA and USDA, the Task Force has three main goals:

1. Reduce honey bee colony loss to economically sustainable levels
2. Increase monarch butterfly numbers to protect annual migration
3. Restore or enhance millions of acres of land for pollinators through public and private action

The EPA just released its "Policy to Mitigate the Acute Risk to Bees from Pesticide Products." The proposed restrictions would prohibit applications of pesticide products that are acutely toxic to bees during bloom where honey bees are known to be present under contract for pollination services. Unfortunately, this policy does nothing to protect bees and other pollinators that are not under pollination contracts.



The Policy also encourages states and tribes to reduce pesticide exposures through the development of MP3s.

In general, the EPA will use its Tier 1 acute risk assessment to determine which products trigger concerns about pollinator risk that label restrictions are intended to address.

Another issue that we are currently working on is the new FDA nutritional labeling requirement. This ruling requires the term "added sugars" to be included on the nutritional information part of honey labels. We are working with the National Honey Board, the National Honey Packers and Dealers Association and the AHPA to provide alternatives regarding this ruling. As of now, the compliance has been delayed until July of 2018. The National Honey Board has presented FDA with alternatives to the wording, which, so far, have been rejected. FDA has agreed to allow an asterisk to be placed after the words "added sugars" with a corresponding note outside the label box.

This year we plan to begin working with Fran Boyd on the new Farm Bill as the 2014 Bill expires on September 30, 2018. We will request the continuance of the ELAP program with an increase in the limit. We will also ask for more pollinator plants on conservation land for increased bee forage, more access for bees on public lands and for continuing or raising appropriations for bee research programs and specialty crop research.

We will also emphasize the importance of continuing the Pollinator Task Force.

We do not really know how the new administration will affect our industry but, we will continue to work with USDA, EPA, FDA and the congressional Pollinator Caucus on behalf of our industry. We thank you for your continued support.