

Government Relations Update

by Zac Browning, Legislative Committee Co-Chair



Directly following a meeting of the National Honey Board this April, industry representatives held a meeting in San Diego to further discuss and develop plans to address the continued need for a clear standard of identity for honey. The meeting was chaired by ABF president, George Hansen. The ABF was also represented by Tim Tucker, Gene Brandi and Zac Browning. This was the second such meeting in the last year. The ABF has been committed to developing a Federal Standard of Identity for several years. The process has been stymied by the FDA's reluctance to respond to industry petitions for a standard since 2006. In 2012, the FDA finally officially reported to the honey industry that it would not promulgate a standard. In the meantime, many states have adopted their own standards, with some differences, leading to confusion among customers, some of whom have filed suit against packers who filter pollen out of the honey that they sell. Clearly, there is a need for a recognized official standard or definition of honey, but the process of obtaining one, even after language is agreed on and proofed, remains uncertain. There is a possibility that once an agreement on language is reached, the standard could be adopted legislatively by congress, if it were to be attached to another related bill.

Farm Bill Process Ramps Up Again!

All indications now suggest that Congress will indeed take another crack at farm legislation this year. Far less certain is the prospect of actually completing the process, as this will be the second attempt in two years to draft language that congressional leaders can come to terms with amid so many fiscal constraints. Even so, the ABF has been working diligently with our Washington allies to ensure that our needs are on top of the stack. Representatives have been making visits to offices on Capitol Hill asking representatives to preserve funding for honey bee research, RMA (crop insurance) programs for honey, the ELAP program, the honey loan program and habitat through conservation initiatives.

There are many challenges for this farm bill cycle. In order to garner needed support for our goals, the ABF has

reached out to other partners and stakeholders with shared interests. We have found common ground with many honey bee groups and other pollinator groups, as may be expected. We have also received support from other groups who have not been traditional partners, particularly with the issue of honey bee habitat. Recently, the ABF was joined by 22 other groups in an effort to ask the USDA to do more to develop and protect honey bee habitat through conservation programs. The groups included partner commodities that need bees for pollination, wildlife and conservation groups, pollinator groups and even agricultural chemical groups. Following up in April, the ABF met with key Senate staff in the company of Ducks Unlimited to appeal for pollinator habitat.

Hope for H2A and Future Guest Worker Programs

As the gang of eight senators, who were tasked with the job of crafting a potentially workable immigration bill, made the announcement that they had reached an agreement, the possibility of a more user friendly guest worker program was resurrected. The plan, which many feel will likely pass the Senate, contains provisions that appeal to most beekeepers using the program.

- H2A would expire following the terms of current visas
- New foreign agricultural workers program administered by USDA
- Program would include provisions for permanent, semi-permanent and temporary foreign agriculture workers
- Program would allow itinerant beekeeping with current special procedures grandfathered in

The ABF has been an advocate for changes to the H2A program for many years. As recently as April, representatives made visits in Washington asking law makers for consideration on many of the measures proposed in this bill. However, it is likely that changes will be made as this legislation is tested in the house, where there are already several less comprehensive immigration bills to be considered. In any case, the language and provisions sought by many beekeepers has remained intact after crossing the first of several hurdles. Stay tuned!



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