

# Government Relations Update

by Gene Brandi, ABF Vice President

On February 7, 2014, President Obama signed the Agricultural Act of 2014, officially ending a long and tumultuous process to reach a consensus on a new farm bill. This new bill, which was strongly supported by votes in the House and the Senate, will set the course for our country's agricultural and nutrition policies through 2018.

There are several issues contained in the pages of this legislation that directly affect beekeepers and pollinators. The American Beekeeping Federation (ABF) has advocated for its community since the inception of the bill, and has succeeded in passing through all but two provisions strongly supported by the ABF and other conservation and pollinator groups.

Provisions contained in the 2014 Farm Bill of interest to beekeepers include;

- Extension of the non-recourse Marketing Assistance Loan for Honey through 2018 at a loan rate of \$0.69 per pound. The terms of the loan are 9 months.
- Permanent funding of a Supplemental Agriculture Disaster Assistance Program, which includes emergency relief to honey producers. Includes coverage of losses during 2012-2013.
- Requirement of the Secretary of Agriculture, in consultation with the Secretary of Interior and the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, to publish guidance on enhancing pollinator health and the long-term viability of populations of pollinators, including recommendations related to allowing for managed honey bees to forage on the National Forest Service lands and planting and maintaining managed honey bee and native pollinator forage on National Forest lands.
- Development of an annual report addressing the decline of managed honey bees and other pollinators; assessing Federal efforts to mitigate pollinator losses and threats to the U.S. commercial beekeeping industry; and providing recommendations to Congress regarding how to better coordinate Federal agency efforts to address the decline of managed honey bees and native pollinators is required.
- Requirement of the Secretary of Agriculture not later than 180 days after enactment, in consultation with persons affected by the possible establishment

of a Federal standard of identity for honey (SOI), to submit to the Commissioner of the FDA a report describing how a Federal Standard of identity of honey would be in the interest of consumers, the honey industry, and U.S. agriculture. In the preparation of the report the Secretary shall take into consideration the Standard of Identity petition filed with FDA on March 2006, including any current industry information clarification, or amendments necessary to update this petition.

- Extension of all pollinator protection provisions (including bees) enacted in the 2008 farm bill through 2018.
- Addition of the term "honey bees" to conservation provisions for native and managed pollinators placed in current law in 2008.
- Expanding of the annual reporting requirement by USDA on CCD to include other health disorders affecting honey bees.
- Reauthorization of conservation programs and provision of mandatory funding for some, that are critical to helping farmers and ranchers implement voluntary conservation practices including establishing habitat and forage for native and managed pollinators.

The two provisions supported by the industry together with many conservation groups and the acceptance of the chemical industry that were dropped from the final conference report (1) language directing the Secretary of Agriculture to establish a task force on Bee Health and Commercial Beekeeping, and (2) language encouraging the Secretary of Agriculture to conduct a pollinator research lab feasibility study.

We continue to work with Farm Bureau in an effort to obtain a waiver/exemption from the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration so that drivers hauling bees would not be required to stop for an additional 30 minutes to rest every eight hours. The effort includes trying to get the Federal Department of Transportation to recognize bees as livestock, as does USDA and the IRS.

Thanks to Fran Boyd for providing the summary of Farm Bill issues. Many thanks go to Fran, George Hansen, Tim Tucker and Zac Browning for their efforts on behalf of ABF in the Farm Bill negotiations over the past several years.

