

Government Relations Update



by Troy Fore, ABF Director of Government Relations



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If you follow the national news at all, you know that the federal government is tied in knots over finances.

For some reason, unknown to me, the Democrats decided not to pass the appropriations bills last summer when they were in the majority. Now, the House Republican majority

is demanding billions in cuts for the year that is half gone. Then, the battle moves to the fiscal year that begins on Oct. 1, 2011.

The President's budget for next year eliminates the USDA's Agriculture Research Service (USDA-ARS) Weslaco Research Center. The funding for the Bee Research Unit

at Weslaco would remain intact, at least in the President's proposal, but it will need a new home. The likely options are to disperse the scientists among the other three ARS beekeeping laboratories (four, if you count the "non-Apis" lab at Logan, Utah), or to relocate the Bee Research Unit, as a whole, at another ARS facility, such as in College Station, Texas.

The ARS is weighing the options. The ABF Board of Directors is also weighing the options and will be presenting our views to the ARS.

The President's proposed budget is just that – a proposal. With cutting the size of the government as the focus of many in Congress, it is certainly not a given that the ARS honey bee research program will escape unscathed.

Everyone agrees that the federal government needs to spend less. There is considerable disagreement, however, over which programs should be cut. It's the reverse of a saying I heard decades ago. Wikipedia attributes it to the late Sen. Russell Long of Louisiana: "Don't tax you, don't tax me, tax that fellow behind the tree."

The problem is there are not enough fellows behind the trees. Programs dear to you and programs dear to me as well will have to be cut. And there will probably have to be some taxing, too – you and me and the fellow behind the tree.

The first iteration of the proposed spending reductions for the remainder of this fiscal year included plans to cut funding for the ARS as a whole by \$246 million. Deeper cuts are likely for the fiscal year starting Oct. 1, 2011.

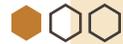
There is another old political saw: "The squeaky wheel gets the grease." If beekeepers want to keep federal honey bee research scientists at work, we have to do some squeaking. If we adopt an attitude of "everyone has to take a hit," we will likely get more than our share of hits. We can't sit on our hands while advocates for other federal programs, even other ag research programs, are urging Congress to fund theirs.

Beekeepers need to contact their Representative and both of their Senators to urge that the small honey bee research program be left intact and remain at least at current spending levels.

H-2A Visas Tightened Up

Many beekeeping operations depend on foreign employees who come into the United States on H-2A visas. This year, for the first time, some of the perennial beekeepers are having problems getting the needed visas.

If your potential employees are experiencing difficulties, you should contact your Congressmen. A paper outlining the need for these employees can be found on the ABF Web site at abfnet.org. You might want to include it with your communications with Congress.



Point out the urgent need for a solution to CCD and other conditions affecting honey bee health. Point out the importance of honey bees to agriculture crops – \$17.9 billion by the latest estimate. Point out that USDA honey bee research is a small program on a tight budget that can't absorb hefty across-the-board cuts like large programs can. Point out how important good honey bee health is to your own beekeeping business – and to the farmers whose crops your bees pollinate.

You can call the Capital switchboard: 202.225.3121 (House); 202.224.3121 (Senate). Ask for the person handling agricultural issues. Or, send a message via the Congressmen's Web sites. You can find them at senate.gov or house.gov.



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Bob Loewen
Honey Buyer
bloewen@ghfillc.com
Phone: (620) 947-3173
Fax: (620) 947-3640