

Government Relations Update



by Troy Fore, ABF Director of Government Relations



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The ABF has been involved on a lot of fronts in recent weeks, and we have given position statements on a variety of issues:

U.S. Honey Producer Board

The proposed order to create the U.S. Honey Producer Research, Promotion

and Consumer Information Order was published on July 14, 2009. The ABF wrote USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service: "We support the intent of the rule, which is to establish a board to research and promote U.S. honey. We feel such a honey research and promotion board is essential to promote the use of honey, to conduct and to administrate vital honey research, to protect the industry from adverse publicity, and to increase the total consumption of honey." Our statement continued: "However, we have concerns about the proposed initial assessment – specifically how the U.S. Honey Producer order assessment will compare in the marketplace with the assessment placed on imported honey through the Honey Packers and Importers order. Comparing the two, our analysis is that both imported honey and domestic honey will pay an assessment of one-cent per pound under the Honey Packers and Importers order. Then, domestic honey will pay an assessment of two-cents per pound under the U.S. Honey Producer order."

Country of Origin Labeling

USDA-AMS asked for comments of regulations to implement the Farm Bill provision requiring that honey labeled "U.S Grade A" or similarly also carry the country of origin. The ABF supported the intent of the rule, but we objected to packers' being allowed only 90 days to use up existing labels. We asked that this "grace period" be extended to a full year. The new regulation was published on July 8, 2009, and became effective on October 6, 2009. It applies to both domestic and imported honey.

California Standard of Identity for Honey

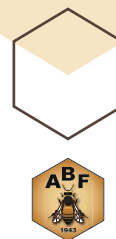
At the request of the California State Beekeepers Association, the ABF sent a letter to Calif. Gov. Schwarzenegger, urging him to sign legislation that would create the second (after Florida) state honey standard of identity. We feel that activity on the state level might prompt the USDA to move on the national standard. (The governor has since signed the legislation along with a batch of other bills.)

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

USDA's Farm Service Agency asked for comments on the continuation of CRP. After recognizing CRP's benefit to honey bees, the ABF made these requests:

- Asking USDA to implement the program to the maximum allowable acreage (32 million acres).
- Asking that pollinator habitat be a primary focus for the program. Pollinator-friendly seed mixes need to be affordable in order to be widely utilized. Seed mixes for CRP containing alfalfa and sweet clover were popular in some areas in the past.

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How to Contact Your Congressional Representative

Representatives

Write: The Honorable _____
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

Call: 202.225.3121
Ask for your representative's office
and request to speak to the agricultural aide.

Senate

Write: The Honorable _____
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Call: 202.224.3121
Ask for your senator's office and
request to speak to the agricultural aide.

E-mail: To locate and e-mail your representatives and senators, visit www.congress.gov.



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These plants are excellent sources of nectar and pollen for honey bees and other pollinators. While these plants are not native, they are widely used in agriculture and wildlife management, as they are affordable legumes that provide clear benefits to soil, water and wildlife.

- Asking that current CRP contract holders be offered the opportunity to re-enroll land into the new program and that USDA provide incentives to replant re-enrolled CRP acres with new seed mixes to replace acres that are now largely devoid of original intended plants or are harboring weeds.
- Asking that USDA maintain clear language to allow for the placement of bee hives on CRP land. The current language regarding bee hives on CRP land is entirely sufficient.

USDA-NASS Honey Report

It is time to renew the authority for the annual National Agricultural Statistics Service honey production survey and report. The ABF is asking that the report be expanded to include pollination activities, since pollination has become so important to beekeepers. Many of the positions of the ABF are drawn from the resolutions adopted at the ABF Annual Business Meeting at the annual conference.

All ABF members are encouraged to forward ideas for resolutions to the ABF Vice President David Mendes for consideration by the Resolutions Committee. Mendes can be reached at davidmendesn@aol.com.

Legislative Fund Contributions

The following ABF members contributed to the ABF Legislative Fund during the months of September and October 2009. These donations enable us to carry out the legislative initiatives that will benefit ABF members and the American beekeeping industry.

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