

Government Relations Update



by Troy Fore, ABF Director of Government Relations



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The scene shifts so rapidly in Washington that it is difficult to say anything with much certainty.

You had probably heard that USDA-NASS announced that it would discontinue the annual bee/honey production report along with a wide range of agricultural survey programs. Then, Congress passed the 2012 Agricultural Appropriations bill, giving the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) sufficient funding to continue some of these reports – those that receive the most support from their industries.

We were advised that beekeepers need to contact NASS and urge the agency to continue the bee/honey report. You can send an e-mail to Joseph Prusacki, NASS statistics division director, at Joseph_Prusacki@nass.usda.gov, explaining the importance of this report to you and to the industry. The same communication should be sent to your members of Congress and to the NASS field office in your state. To locate the NASS office in your state, go to http://nass.usda.gov/About_NASS/sso_directory.pdf.

The fate of the bee/honey report may be settled by the time you receive this newsletter and have time to reach to our appeal. Nevertheless, contact with NASS can be useful. With the climate we are facing in Washington, we will be faced with constant battles to preserve anything we are getting from the federal government (and state governments, as well).

We have also learned that USDA-AMS is cutting back and the monthly *Honey Market News* is on the chopping block. You are encouraged to make contacts with the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) on this one. Here are three e-mail addresses:

- Under Secretary Edward Avalos, ed.avalos@osec.usda.gov
- AMS Administrator Rayne Pegg, rayne.pegg@usda.gov
- Deputy Administrator for Fruit and Vegetable Programs Robert Keeney, robert.keeney@ams.usda.gov

There is almost no way we can stay up with developments such as these. We are constantly in the mode of reacting. However, we can make some headway by maintaining a steadily positive approach. We can do this by ensuring that people who will be making decisions affecting beekeepers are aware of the impacts of their decisions. We can start with our members of Congress, keeping in touch with their offices, both in or areas as well as in Washington. When an issue comes up that can affect beekeepers, they need to immediately recognize that beekeepers are an important part of their constituencies – not be surprised later when they get a complaint from a beekeeper.

As representatives of you, ABF members, the ABF Legislative Committee attempts to maintain contact with the Congressional staffers for the relevant committees, such as Agriculture and Appropriations. We try to keep them clued into our industry's needs and positions on issues. Likewise, we are in regular contact with the agencies that directly impact our industry, such as USDA, FDA, EPA and the rest of the bureaucratic alphabet soup.

This is a never-ending process. New people are constantly coming on the scene that need to be educated about honey and bees. You may get a new Congressman in next year's election. Your Congressman of 12 years may get new staffers. The work goes on.

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