

Government Relations Update



by Troy Fore, ABF Director of Government Relations



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The House and Senate agricultural committees have begun work toward enacting a new farm bill, as they do every four to six years. The committees have asked the national beekeeping organizations what changes they would like to see in the new legislation.

At this writing, their “wish list” was being finalized. The following is a near-final version of the letter the American Beekeeping Federation and American Honey Producers Association are jointly presenting to the committees. The two organizations encourage their individual members to use the requests they have compiled when making personal contact with their Congressmen.

On behalf of the U.S. honey production and crop pollination industry, the American Beekeeping Federation and American Honey Producers Association respectfully submit this brief summary of priority items for the 2011 Farm Bill. During the process ahead, we look forward to working with you on these important matters affecting America’s honey producers, the beekeepers that pollinate over 90 different crops, and the growers of billions of dollars of U.S. farm production that rely on honey bee pollination.

For the 2011 Farm Bill, our industry’s priority issues are as follows:

Marketing Loan Program for Honey. It is crucial for Congress to continue the current marketing loan program for honey, which has served its intended purpose as an orderly and effective marketing tool and helped to ensure the survival of many beekeepers at minimal administrative cost to the U.S. Government. During the life of this program, no forfeiture of honey has occurred and no loan deficiency payments have been made. Based on increased production costs and prices over the past decade, and CBO estimates showing minimal financial exposure to the U.S. Government, Congress should maintain the current 69 cents per pound marketing loan rate for honey—as set in the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008 (“2008 Farm Bill”).

Supplemental Agricultural Disaster Assistance Program for Honey (ELAP). Through Section 901(e) of the Trade Act Amendment and Section 531(e) of the Federal Crop Insurance Act Amendment, the 2008 Farm Bill requires the Secretary of Agriculture to expend up to \$50 million per year to assist “eligible producers of livestock, honey bees and farm-raised fish” in the reduction of losses due to diseases, adverse weather and other conditions that are not covered elsewhere. This new disaster program, commonly referred to as “ELAP” (Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honey Bees and Farm-Raised Fish Program), has proved to be especially valuable for struggling beekeepers whose colonies have been devastated in recent years by the major, still unresolved problem of Colony Collapse Disorder (“CCD”). We strongly urge the Congress to extend ELAP, which expires at the end of September this year.

Continued Support for Sustained Bee Research and Other Essential Activities. Continued bee research authorization at least at the 2008 levels is critical to the industry’s success and to insure adequate pollination of American agricultural crops. The “pollinator protection” provisions of the 2008 Farm Bill authorize a total of \$20 million in new funding per year for critical honey bee research. These authorizations were largely in response to the numerous startling reports about the effects of Colony Collapse Disorder (“CCD”) that have highlighted the urgent need for increased and sustained honey bee research. The authorizations are also sufficiently targeted to help address other existing and future critical honey bee health research needs including formidable challenges from pests, mites, agricultural chemicals and pollution issues. As a point of reference for consideration of which honey bee research items to include in the 2011 Farm Bill, and at what funding levels, we would note that the 2008 Farm Bill specifically authorizes the following:

- \$10 million for “research and extension” grants each year for honey bee survey, data collection, investigation, research, prevention, and health promotion activities through the USDA’s Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service (“CSREES”).
- \$7.25 million annually in additional funding to increase the capacity and infrastructure of USDA’s Agricultural Research Service (“ARS”) to address



CCD and other long-term threats to pollinators through necessary research and hiring of personnel. This total amount of \$7.25 million per year is to be divided as follows among three key areas: (1) \$3 million for ARS bee research laboratories; (2) \$2.5 million for ARS research on honey and native bee physiology, and other research; and (3) \$1.75 million for an ARS Area Wide CCD Research Program; and

- \$2.75 million, for each of the five years covered under the Farm Bill, for the Animal and Plant Health Service (“APHIS”) to conduct a nationwide honey bee pest and pathogen surveillance program.

In addition to the above authorizations, the 2008 Farm Bill created a “Specialty Crop Research and Extension Initiative.” Unlike the above authorizations which are subject to an annual discretionary appropriation, this specialty crop section provides mandatory funding for a number of research items related to specialty crops. The Secretary of Agriculture was required to make \$30 million available for this purpose in 2008 and \$50 million in each of fiscal years 2009 through 2012, totaling \$230 million over the life of the bill. No less than 10%, or \$23 million, of such mandatory funding must go to “efforts to identify and address threats from pests and diseases, including threats to specialty crop pollinators.” We appreciate that Congress has made available significant amounts of this grant funding for university and private sector research on specific issues facing the beekeeping and honey sector. It should be pointed out that while honey bee projects are eligible for Specialty Crop Research and Extension Initiative funding, thus far honey bee projects have not been selected.

In short, there remains a critical and ongoing need for the various bee research authorizations included in the last Farm Bill. One other provision we favor extending would require the Secretary of Agriculture to submit an annual report to Congress on USDA’s progress in addressing CCD.

Protect Pollinator Habitat Through Continued Conservation Program Initiatives.

Critical habitat loss is a major threat to the beekeeping industry and the health and viability of all pollinators. Land use changes in agriculture, urban sprawl, and frequent pesticide exposure has severely reduced the amount of suitable land available for bees and other pollinators. Conservation lands, especially Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

lands have provided a vital safe haven for Honey Bees to propagate, forage, and produce honey while not engaged in crop pollination. Other pollinators also utilize the conservation lands for foraging and nesting and foraging in an undisturbed, pesticide free landscape.

The 2008 Farm Bill authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to encourage “the development of habitat for native and managed pollinators; and the use of conservation practices that promote native and managed pollinators” during the administration of any conservation program. It is crucial that USDA continues to support and fund the development of pollinator habitat through conservation programs. Furthermore, conservation programs need to remain fully funded at maximum acreage levels in order to provide necessary safe havens for the many pollinators needed to pollinate our nation’s food supply.

Crop Insurance for Honey. Congress first authorized crop insurance for honey in 2000. Following delays in implementation, such a program is currently being offered on a limited basis in about 25 states. Our industry believes Congress should continue to evaluate this pilot crop insurance program for honey in terms of its overall cost, effectiveness and level of participation.

Standard of Identity for Honey and Improved Honey Import Surveillance and Testing.

There is currently no standard of identity for honey, unlike for many other food products. Consumers do not always know when they are buying pure honey, as opposed to deceptively labeled imitation sweeteners or adulterated blends. FDA has still taken no action on a formal petition, pending before it for more than five years, that proposes a standard of identity for honey. Congress should mandate, in the Farm Bill or otherwise, that FDA finally issue this standard. Congress should also consider other common-sense labeling measures that would inform consumers of the sources of honey. We support additional funding for FDA and CBP to help assure the safety and transparency of honey imports, especially from developing countries, and prevent circumvention and non-payment of duties owed to the U.S. treasury.

Environmental Regulation and Enforcement.

The central role of honey bees in the environment and the farm economy should be emphasized in environmental regulation and enforcement, including in the review and approval of new farm chemicals and treatments and in the effective enforcement of rules against the misuse of



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(From the President...continued from the cover)

income from pollination fees. Many beekeepers I spoke to were intrigued about the possibility to charge crop pollination fees. I came away feeling thankful to be a commercial beekeeper in the United States.

As a representative of ABF and U.S. beekeeping, I was approached by the leadership of Apimondia with the question, "When will the United States host an Apimondia?" According to the Apimondia Web site, the last time the United States hosted a Congress was in 1967 in Maryland. Canada last held a Congress in 1999 in Vancouver. I learned that since Apimondia has most of its support and membership in Europe, the schedule follows one meeting in Europe and then one in another part of the world every two years. Last Congress was in France in 2009, Argentina in 2011, Ukraine in 2013 and South

Korea in 2015. 2017 will likely return to Europe and 2019 is the next available slot for the United States to consider.

It is a very BIG job to host an Apimondia congress. It would require a dedicated group of workers for several years of commitment. I am willing to pitch the idea and even help out, but I am not so sure that I would like to lead such an effort. I promised to present the idea to the U.S. beekeeping community and see what happens. So far, the U.S. beekeepers asked about this have responded that they think this is a GREAT IDEA! What do you think? We will have the President of Apimondia, Gilles Ratia, at the next ABF annual conference in Las Vegas and he can further elaborate on the steps involved. I also welcome comments and volunteers. We will certainly keep you all posted.



(From the Vice President...continued from page 3)

crew sent out the call for a beekeeper to get the bees out of the boxes, which had eventually resulted in the series of phone calls and my son asking for the name of a swarm catcher.

Back at my warehouse, with the combs unloaded, and the whole story being told, the dots connect. I had two thoughts: one, if I had known they were going to be doing this outside instead of in a studio or warehouse, I could have saved them a whole lot of excitement; and two, very few people can even imagine the total havoc in an area when large numbers of honey bees get into a robbing frenzy. This TV crew will not soon forget and will

certainly always wonder what went wrong to make the gentle honeybees go berserk.

With the combs returned, a sheepish property manager asked if I might have about 10 gallons of dead bees for them to use in filming. Seriously. I ignored this teachable moment and returned to my work.

The show is called "Grimm" and will air on NBC this fall. The episode is called "The Queen Bee." It is not a documentary, but rather a crime/detective show based somehow on *Grimm's Fairy Tales*. If you have complaints, don't call me.

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current treatments. In the Farm Bill or otherwise, Congress should, among other things, mandate that sub-lethal effects on honey bees be considered in the regulatory process for new agricultural treatments, and it should take other actions to assure that honey bees are better protected in the environmental enforcement process.

Thank you for your consideration of our industry's views on these priority items. Both of our organizations look forward with enthusiasm to working together with you

and your colleagues as Congress starts to focus its attention on the 2011 Farm Bill. If you have questions at any time, please do not hesitate to contact us.

(Signed by AHPA President Mark Jensen and ABF President Dave Mendes.)