

Observations of a Commercial Beekeeper

August 16 2013

Penn State Pollinator Symposium

Progress made in the policy arena to improve honey bee health?

Since last Symposium held 3 years
ago

Two primary themes

We need “safe places” to keep our bees

“Ask the Bees” or “beyond anecdotal info”

Challenge: To find a positive message to share!



Now in our fourth year the NHBAB continues



Protecting \$ 50 billion in pollinated food production through:

- * **Balanced Pesticide Policy**
- * **Evidence Based Decisions**
- * **Proactive Education**

Mites, viruses, disease, environmental extremes, loss of foraging acres and the increased tonnage of chemicals being used by agriculture and individuals have all put stress on the honey bee to the level that their continued survivability at levels necessary to sustain our industry is in question. We cannot continue to experience a 30% loss of hives each year in colony count and continue to stay economically viable. It was in light of these multi-faceted challenges that the National Honey Bee Advisory Board was created. Its parent organizations are the [American Honey Producers Association](#) and the [American Beekeeping Federation](#). Its purpose is to gain an understanding of the issues that are impacting our industry and provide the parent organizations with advice to pursue remedies to those issues.

All of the individual members of the NHBAB have suffered significant losses of colonies in the past few years and are devoted to addressing issues that affect all beekeepers, large and small across the country. They do this, donating their own time and resources in an attempt to develop strategies that will hopefully result in

ABF and AHPA working together!

Beekeepers are still new to the policy arena

Still learning to navigate in tricky waters

Working with no staff or funding

USDA ARS has developed a model to discuss colony health

- Pathogens
- Pesticides
- Poor nutrition

Interaction of these factors responsible for colony health is generally agreed

Controversy begins over which factor is primary stressor and which are secondary

Jeff Pettis interview...

Said something along the lines that

“beekeepers don’t feel the pace of progress is fast enough”

What an understatement !

Beekeeper frustration very high

Report Card on progress in the field

A beekeeper's perspective

- Pathogens D-
- Pesticides D-
- Poor Nutrition D-

- Have another meeting B+
“I am from the government and here to help”

Beekeeping in transition

- High inputs
- Where do we keep them?
- How to control pathogens?
- Queen failure rates sky high
- Honey production way down
- Pollination income is only way to survive
- 70% of all the hives in US needed for almonds



Healthy beehives!

Progress with Pathogens

- Varroa must be controlled
- Legal Amitraz product is now approved...
same problem as the last 20 years...
resistance comes quickly
- Confusion over Nosema controls?
- Beekeepers note that environment is an important factor in mite and nosema growth
- Tech Transfer needed

Progress with Pesticide policy

- We have been told that Pellston SETAC will vastly improve risk assessment
- In the meantime new systemic products are approved without these necessary cautions
- States have told EPA how they need better label language
- Enforcement of daytime applications of extended residual insecticides absent
- Lots of concerns about fungicides
- “Glacial Pace” of change not good enough
- Need tech transfer to collect field samples

Progress with Nutrition

- Conservation land is converted to a “corn desert” at an alarming pace
- Round up ready crops eliminate all weeds that pollinators used to depend on
- Road side herbicide programs funded with State and Federal money
- More hives needed for pollination... Less areas to support these hives
- Supplemental feeding is only way to survive

More than “Chicken Little”

- Not good enough to just complain
- What programs work to expedite honey bee health?
- Beekeepers reluctant to ask for help, blame themselves for failing hives
- Beekeeper experiences often dismissed as “anecdotal information”
- How can we improve the report card grades for the next Penn State Symposium?

Create “Safe Places” for bees

Please define the term!

- Must be natural quality forage... supplemental feeding is not enough
- Must avoid pesticides on bloom or systemic pesticides that will reach bees
- Must be available at a reasonable price
- Corn/soybean desert does not qualify
- USDA and USGS is working on this project in North Dakota
- Increasing conservation land is important but not enough... Ag areas must be “Bee Friendly”
- Drift watch program to move bees away from pesticide spray does not work for beekeepers or native pollinators

Ask the Bees!

- Honey bee health is more complex than originally thought
- This is not a “short term” issue like past episodes of disappearing disease
- Beekeeper knowledge and experience is a necessary component to expedite solutions
- Self reporting is not enough... need resources to collect accurate “data” from real world
- Tech Transfer teams are a practical means to collect this data
- Bee Informed Partnership and others have begun this process but need much more support

Tech Transfer

- 3 teams currently in place for commercial beekeepers
Midwest, California, Southeast
- Could be valuable interface between beekeepers and research community
- Bee Informed Partnership collects information
- Could offer accurate information to beekeeper
- Collect samples of bees, wax, nectar and provide feedback on mite, nosema, virus loads
- Need to collect and archive pollen samples for later pesticide screening
- Foundation has been built with limited start up money
Need more support to expand programs

Ask the bees

- Must get beyond current logjam of “he said, she said” circular anecdotal arguments
- Beekeepers will feel more confident if regulators and researchers base decisions on “real world information” not test hives
- Role of pesticides and pathogens will become more evident with larger data set

Report Card in 2016

- Maybe not all A's but lots of room for improvement
- Beekeepers are reluctant to ask for help
- Bees and Beekeepers are in transition period
- Could use help to figure out "New Rules"
- A big "Thank You" to Penn State for hosting this Symposium