



Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
CHARLES H. BRONSON, Commissioner
The Capitol • Tallahassee, FL 32399-0800
www.doacs.state.fl.us

Please Respond to:

Division of Plant Industry
PO Box 147100 / 1911 SW 34th Street
Gainesville, Florida 32614-7100
Telephone: (352) 372-3505/Fax: (352) 334-0715
<http://www.doacs.state.fl.us/pi/plantinsp/apiary/apiary.html>
hayesg@doacs.state.fl.us

**MINUTES
HONEY BEE TECHNICAL COUNCIL
December 8th, 2010**

**Division of Plant Industry Building Auditorium
Gainesville, Florida**

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Bill Merritt, Chairman
Jerry Hayes, Secretary
Dr. Jamie Ellis, UF/IFAS Apiculturist
Gary Ranker, President, Florida State Beekeepers Association
David Mendes
Jerry Latner
Steve Cantu
Nancy Gentry

**OTHERS PRESENT:
(see attached list)**

Secretary, Jerry Hayes called the Honey Bee Technical Council meeting to order at 10:00 AM. He welcomed the group and asked everyone present if they would introduce themselves so that Ms. Cathy DeWeese, Administrative Secretary would be able to identify who was speaking when typing up the minutes.

Mr. Hayes then turned the meeting over to Chairman Bill Merritt. The first order of business was Chairman Merritt asked if there were any errors or omission to the minutes of July 29, 2009 before requesting a motion from the council to approve the minutes. (These minutes were previously sent to the council members.) There was no correction. A motion was made by Jerry Latner to approve the minutes as mailed, seconded by Nancy Gentry. Motion carried.

Chairman Merritt called roll, all council members were present.

Research Review/Extension updates

Mr. Hayes introduced Dr. Jamie Ellis, Extension Apiculturist from the University of Florida/Institute of Food and Agriculture Sciences who gave an extensive power point presentation updating the HBTC council and audience present on the various research projects that he and his staff, along



Florida Agriculture and Forest Products
Over \$100 Billion for Florida's Economy

with the Department of Agriculture's Division of Plant Industry's Apiary Inspection Section are currently involved with.

Dr. Ellis explained that only 20% of his responsibility is towards research to the 1800 Florida registered beekeepers. He and his staff are focused on the biggest issues that beekeepers are encountering. Here is a brief review of the research projects he spoke on:

- Honey Bee Research & Extension Lab: Pathogens/Parasite Control and Honey Bee Nutrition (HBREL)
- Effect of Pesticide on Honey Bee Health
- Pollination Ecology – Native Pollinators
- African Honey Bees
- Honey Bee Ecology

Dr. Ellis talked about continuing research for Varroa mites. He stated that most research is expensive and equipment can be costly. He advised that some research has been successful using RNAi for the Israeli virus and *Nosema apis* control. *Nosema ceranae* is almost always found in hives in Florida. Minnesota has the worst infection rate for *Nosema ceranae* and Florida's colonies are equal to Minnesota. Research using RNAi is currently being conducted on the IAPV virus. He pointed out that Small Hive Beetles continue to be a problem and really stressed the use of traps to help keep colonies protected and to keep the number of small hive beetles low. Dr. Ellis noted when hives are weakened some of these other factors can kill even moderately stressed hives. The most important thing is to keep colonies strong.

He briefly spoke about \$4.1 million dollars that was to be shared among 17 state collaborators. Florida received the least amount of funds for National Research and Extension Initiative to Reverse Pollinator Decline. Honey bees can forage up to 80 square mile radius and honey bees are exposed to many more pesticides, and other chemicals than originally known thus making pollinator protection extremely challenging.

Africanized bee spread and entrenchment continues. Best Management Practices for maintaining European Honey bees is an ongoing educational pursuit. Colony identification for Africanization is very time consuming. We and the Apiary Section are collaborating with Dr. David DeJong, University of Sao Paul, Brazil, who is trying to develop a more effective, less time consuming methodology for the identification of African/Africanized honey bees.

Mr. Hayes thanked Dr. Ellis for his valuable research efforts and his presentation.

Mr. Hayes advised the group that the HBTC had just drafted a Memorandum to newly elected Commissioner of Agriculture, Adam Putnam. This memo expressed that the HBTC is looking forward to helping and advising Commissioner Putnam by coordinating the commissioner's goals for improving and enhancing Florida's Beekeeping Industry.

Mr. Hayes then turned the meeting over to Mr. Dave Mendes who wanted to discuss how to protect the beekeeping industry concerning locations allowed for honey bees. Misinformation is being given out by non-beekeepers, city, county municipalities as well as homeowner's association as to whether or not bees may be placed in an area.

Mr. Mendes spoke of the growth of recreational beekeepers. He addressed the concerns of commercial, part time, and recreational beekeepers that are losing locations in agricultural areas due to local regulations and false information that prohibits them from continuing their vocation or avocation.



There was a thorough discussion on problems concerning siting of honey bee colonies because of the difference of perception of this Industry among various county/city/governmental agencies. The question Mr. Mendes had for the audience was whether or not they felt that it would be good if the Department of Agriculture would be willing to accept the position of reviewing locations and siting issues if given the responsibility.

An open discussion took place among the HBTC and audience. Mr. Gary Ranker, the newly elected President for the Florida State Beekeepers Association, stated that except for one (who he would not name), there was about 99% agreement that beekeepers would be agreeable to the assistance of the Department of Agriculture. Based on this information and more discussion, it was decided that a survey questionnaire of how to proceed for protection of the beekeepers of Florida would be distributed in the "Melitto" by Dr. Jamie Ellis, and perhaps the Florida State Beekeepers Newsletter.

If this issue has the support of the industry, an advisory board for the Department of Agriculture should be formed to write language for beekeeper allowing them to freely maintain honey bee colonies in Florida's 67 counties.

Someone stated that some counties were against honey bees because of public safety issues. It was brought out that most beekeepers are participating in Best Management Practices, a voluntary program to establish manageability of their colonies and are trying to be responsible beekeepers in the presence of Africanized honey bees in Florida.

FSBA President Gary Ranker said it was nice to hear a committed coordinated effort between the HBTC and FSBA.

It was brought up that a similar issue had failed to generate interest with FDACS last year.

Mr. Ranker said it would be a difficult task getting people, municipalities, mayors, etc. to be agreeable to any suggested model ordinance. Chairman Merritt said this is a tough problem, but that was why beekeepers need to be on board.

Mr. Chappie McChesney introduced himself and stated that if you will check the internet other states have passed rules and we could choose language from their already implemented law.

There was some discussion about insurance and that if we could show that the municipalities were covered they might be more agreeable with allowing beekeeping in already restricted areas. Chairman Merritt advised most beekeepers have this type of coverage. At this point, Mr. Ranker advised we needed a leader to champion this issue. He asked Mr. Mendes if he would, but Mr. Mendes politely declined advising he already was over committed, but would chair this committee if absolutely needed.

HBTC member Jerry Latner advised that the FSBA, the HBTC and the 1800 beekeepers in Florida need to be in step. We have to be one voice if a proposal was made to the Legislature.

There was again discussion that some beekeepers want this issue left alone. They are not currently having problems in their rural area. Under consideration that there is concern ultimately, about acreage restrictions as new out of states residents move in.

Chairman Merritt advised at the end of the questionnaire there would be a last question as to what are your thoughts on this in 20 words or less. Also, what are your issues?

Mr. McChesney advised that if there are too many opinions; many local governing bodies may see this as a way to introduce fees. Uniformity is what is needed. Some are under the impression that the HBTC represents only the "Big Boy Beekeepers" (migratory). Mr. Merritt advised that this was not so. Mr. Cutts interjected that to get multi-county/city/government agencies to agree would be



difficult, that they will not accept it, but if the Department of Agriculture took the lead and continued to educate the public, this should help.

David Mendes says that we want to present a clear and concise message that honey bees are important.

Beekeeper Tom Nolan from Bradenton introduced himself stating that he would volunteer to assist with the wording for this survey. He has worked on political campaigns and he was sure that he could help. Mr. Hayes asked if Mr. Nolan's services would be free. Mr. Nolan said he would donate time or if there were specific requirements he would give a cut rate, or call in some chips. Chairman Merritt said good because the HBTC works on a zero budget.

There was discussion that if something was not written specifically and written into a code, that it would be prohibited.

Mr. Nolan said that he would be willing to help the council raise funds to help with educational needs. Chairman Merritt advised that with the Bee College, Dr. Ellis was doing a good job with educating beekeepers and the public through the University's Extension Program.

Keith Eldridge stated that if we lose the small scale back yard beekeepers or if they were restricted where they could not keep bees that we are hurting ourselves because we are losing older beekeepers and if you don't get the young beekeeper interested there will not be a beekeeping industry. Dr. Ellis was again recognized for his beekeeping classes, educational outreach on the African honey bees, and that these educational tools were useful to protect the back yard beekeepers. We have tools to teach today's youth about beekeeping between these classes and the Future Farmers of American.

Mr. Mendes said this would be an ongoing issue. We need to be more specific, creating a framework to allow bees in all county/city locations.

Ray Claxton advised that on a local level, if any "Bill" was written with the right language then each beekeeper needed to contact their local legislator to request their endorsement of this bill to pass, if not, only those that were opposed would call.

Chairman Merritt said some people always question the importance of honey bees, even those counties that do allow them now. This is why we need expertise on these problems and Mr. Hayes was that expert. Mr. Hayes confirmed that we do have calls pertaining to how can beekeepers have the right to put bees near homeowner's properties. My Hayes informed the group that for the most part, if there is a problem with honey bees, most beekeepers try to be cooperative. However homeowner's aren't as cooperative when they do not understand the value of honey bees. All Apiary Inspection staff do their best to educate them about the importance of beekeeping and most try to be more cooperative after they have gained some knowledge.

Mr. Hayes introduced Dr. Wayne Dixon, who is the Acting Director of the Division of Plant Industry. Dr. Dixon said he felt like an outsider on a learning curve. He likes to observe and absorb before suggesting recommendations. He felt that that the HBTC and the FSBA should have an open conversation as to what the Department can do for you. Is it a statutory Model Ordinance for Florida's 67 counties? This would require a Rule Amendment and should be accepted by a majority by the HBTC and the FSBA. Merritt suggested a committee which should consider small scale beekeepers, Gary Ranker interjected that also a commercial beekeeper and a scientific PhD to advise what also might need addressing.

Mr. Mendes advised that this committee would need to identify questions, and that the members needed to be aware the Dr. Ellis was not available as this would be a conflict of interest for him since he is for all Florida consumers and not just an Apiculturist. Someone suggest Dr. Malcolm Sanford



and Tom Nolan as a legal expert, with FSBA President Gary Ranker. Someone would need to Chair this group to make sure that they are going in the correct direction. Three from the FSBA and three from the HBTC, (Jerry Latner, Nancy Gentry and David Mendes) agreed to be on this committee. Dr. Dixon said there should be no more than 7. Mr. Hayes was asked to participate.

Someone brought to the group's attention that previous legislation on this same issue had been thrown out and asked what happened to the other committee. They were concerned that this would not move forward. Chairman Merritt noted that as this effort failed, the original committee was dissolved.

Nancy Gentry said she felt that the previous effort (House Bill 1339) failed because the right message was not delivered. Confusion resulted and a few even more confused beekeepers confronted an Deputy Commissioner. FDACS' support which had been in force was withdrawn. Farm Bureau support continued and continues now, but the Beekeeping Industry needs to speak in a unified voice. The fundamental issue is who has control over where beekeepers at all levels from professional commercial to part time or recreational, may locate their colonies. Will it be 67 different counties, or thousands of cities, homeowner's association, individual non beekeeper homeowner's orwho?

Gary Ranker advised there was one beekeeper that could give opposition and asked if he should be on this committed. The council said there was nothing that precludes his involvement with FSBA having their own committee and have him on it.

Dr. Sanford said that he supports the zoning of bee hives and that there would be a lot of different opinions as to whether honey bees can be incorporated into restrictive locations.

A motion was made by Steve Cantu, seconded by David Mendes to:

form a committee as previously named (Gary Ranker, Dr. Malcolm Sanford, Jerry Hayes, Tom Nolan, Jerry Latner, Nancy Gentry and David Mendes) to explore and research through surveying beekeepers that would allow the Florida Department of Agriculture regulatory oversight of honey bee locations within the State of Florida.

Mr. Hayes said that Dr. Dixon brought newly elected Commissioner Adam Putnam to the Apiary Inspection Section while touring the Division of Plant Industry facility. His time was short, but he spent about 15 minutes in Apiary talking about bees and beekeeping. Dr. Dixon stated that he put a bee in his bonnet advising Commissioner-Elect Putnam that we were working on protecting beekeepers with to be developed statutory and rule-making language.

At this time, Chairman Merritt introduced Nancy Gentry to speak about working with Agricultural Law Enforcement. Nancy informed the group that Chapter 586, Florida Administrative Code, regulates honey bees, beekeepers, registration of hives, unwanted races of bees, honey mislabeling, etc. Theft of agricultural products or crimes committed against beekeepers are not specifically mentioned under agricultural law.

Jerry Latner advised with the onset of Varroa mite, Nosema, Colony Collapse Disorder, and parasites there are fewer honey bees which means the value of hives increase and when that happens honey bee theft becomes a reality.

Steve Cantu said at the May Florida Farm Bureau meeting he advised them that John Gentzel has a small location of 20 acres and had his bees there for a pollination contract when he discovered a truck loading his hives. Because he could describe and identify the hives specifically the Sheriff's Department allowed Mr. Gentzel to reclaim his colonies and the violator was charged with theft.



At this time, there was discussion of a North Florida beekeeper's incidents involving several beekeepers's property being stolen, including their honey, their bees, and various equipment. This beekeeper has been charged with theft and is currently incarcerated. Ms. Gentry suggested the attendees research 812.014 and 812.015 by going to www.flsenate.com to review the lack of honey bee inclusion. This makes agricultural law enforcement officers powerless to help beekeepers.

The HBTC council agreed that we need to meet with Frankie Hall of the Florida Farm Bureau and Legislative Director Ben Park to draft and introduce a bill so that bees and beekeepers are covered by Agricultural enforcement for the 2011 Legislative Session.

A motion was made by Nancy Gentry, seconded by Jerry Latner to:

request Commissioner-elect Putnam create and draft a bill to include honey bees, honey bee products, equipment, and beekeepers to be added to Agriculture enforcement of violations of farm theft.

Ms. Gentry said the this should be filed in the 2011 Legislative Session and that once the bill is created, updated and filed notification should be sent through the University of Florida's "Melitto Files" and Dr. Sanford's Florida State Beekeepers Newsletter. All beekeepers should contact their local legislators requesting that they pass this bill.

Ms. Gentry said that potential theft can be prevented by beekeepers doing the following:

- Register hives annually.
- All hives branded with the Florida registration number – if hives are purchased or sold a bill of sale should be obtained from the seller.
- Brand all woodenware.
- Create a unique symbol and brand woodenware in an obscure location
- File an incident report with the local law enforcement authority when a theft occurs.

Chairman Merritt asked if there were any other issues. None were brought before the council.

All items being discussed and agreed upon the meeting was adjourned at 12:15 PM

Respectfully submitted by G. W. Hayes, Jr.
December 8th, 2010

