

BBKA Endorsement Policy

1. Introduction.

The BBKA has engaged for a number of years in discussions with leading agro-chemical companies with the principal objective of protecting our honey bee colonies through encouraging those companies to promote good stewardship of pesticides. This relationship which goes back many years has coincided with a substantial reduction in pesticide poisonings of bees from almost 100 pa in the nineteen nineties to the one or even none pa over recent years. The BBKA has also been successful in getting a list of good practice in the use of pesticides included in the UK Pesticides Handbook, the bible for users and contractors in this area. At present the BBKA 'endorses' the proper use of four products, that is to say it allows the manufacturer to market the product as "Bee Friendly – when used in accordance with the directions" and encourages the company to promote proper use and stewardship of the product and to use the BBKA Logo. In return the BBKA receives endorsement fees totalling £17,500 p.a. from these four companies. These fees are paid to BBKA Enterprises Ltd and passed to the BBKA to pay for various activities, e.g the setting-up of the Members Register, improvements to BBKA News, repairs to the National Beekeeping Centre, etc.

This policy has attracted some criticism in the past and came into the spotlight some months ago when there were some serious poisonings in Germany when a pesticide, not being one of the products endorsed by the BBKA and belonging to a completely different chemical class, was mis-applied to seeds. It has been found that the necessary fixer (glue) that attaches the pesticide to the seed, was not used and thus when planted, pesticide dust was released settling on crops being foraged by bees, with calamitous results. In order to clear the air on this issue the BBKA has put it on the agenda for the next ADM in January. At the 2005 ADM delegates rejected a proposition for the BBKA to cease its endorsement policy by a substantial majority.

Thus far SBKA has supported the BBKA policy through the delegated powers of your representative, supported by Council. The topic came up for discussion at the Council meeting on Oct 9th, and it was agreed that now is the time to find out what our members really think. There will be various votes at the ADM and Council wants to be sure that our delegate acts as the membership wants. So we decided that we would, as a matter of urgency given the serious nature of the subject, circulate a document setting out the facts as fairly and fully as we can and ask you to relay your opinions to your Divisional Committees, and, we hope, come along to the AGM to make them known and if possible to settle the SBKA policy.

2. The basic facts.

- The BBKA would never knowingly embark on a course of action harmful to bees.
- All pesticides are strictly controlled by the Pesticides Safety Directorate (PSD) working to Government and EU standards.
- The PSD is responsible for overseeing the testing and licensing of pesticides.
- All endorsements are for the *proper use of the specific product* and not the active (chemical) substance or the company.
- All four existing endorsements are for synthetic pyrethroids (SP).

- Beekeepers have for years exposed their bees to high levels of SPs in the form of Bayvarol and Apistan.
 - SPs, used properly in pesticide sprays, have a strong repellent odour for bees and break down rapidly after application.
 - The BBKA can, at present, see no new chemicals emerging that might qualify for endorsement, but this does not mean that none will be forthcoming.
 - The overwhelming proportion of pesticide residues in beeswax are the hive chemicals used to control Varroa – in Britain SPs from Bayvarol and Apistan.
 - The number of reported spray-related colony losses in Britain has fallen from round 100 twenty years ago to just one in the last two years, and in this case the farmer concerned had mixed his sprays incorrectly, destroying the repellent odour.
 - The BBKA does not rely on endorsement income to meet its basic running costs – but it does help in many ways, not least in helping to run the vigorous campaign now in progress to get more funding from the Government for bee research.
 - To maintain its activities exactly as they are now without endorsement income would require an increase in capitation of about £1.50 per Registered Member.
 - An endorsement can be seen as evidence that the BBKA is serious about influencing the debate on the environment for our bees. It makes it a responsible player in a complex world and not just a marginal pressure group.
 - The companies value the endorsement, so that it can be used to harness them into the process of ensuring responsible use is made of the endorsed product and that the rogues are prosecuted.
3. The spectrum of opinions. Among Associations these run as follows:
- The extreme moral argument – under no circumstances should the BBKA even talk to the (evil) agro-chemical companies.
 - The ‘don’t sell your soul’ argument. Even if the BBKA does talk to the pesticide companies, it should never compromise its independence by taking money.
 - The ‘moral end of pragmatism’ argument. Before talking to the companies, and possibly taking money, the BBKA should conduct its own independent tests of the chemical concerned, but this is impractical.
 - The ‘mainstream pragmatic argument’, or as some might put it ‘the mercenary but cautious’ approach. The BBKA cannot possibly afford to conduct its own tests to the PSD qualification standard, but this should not prevent it going into endorsement arrangements provided that it uses all its available expertise to assess the evidence – the PSD results, the scientific (bee and chemical) literature, the manufacturers’ literature, etc. NB: but NOT Wikipedia, which is neither peer reviewed nor moderated.
 - The ‘give us the money’ argument, which would state that since the BBKA is a ‘good thing’, it should have no qualms about taking money wherever it can get it.

3. The Next Steps.

All of the above arguments, except possibly the last, are defensible. Where Surrey stands will depend on what you tell us. We want to listen to any serious opinion, preferably backed up with traceable references. If you have information or a point not covered in this document let your Divisional Secretary have it and it will be circulated. We are asking Divisions to discuss this at their AGMs, so that what the ordinary membership of SBKA really thinks will be revealed at the AGM (the more members who come along the better) and used to guide the actions the SBKA Delegate takes at the BBKA in January.

4. Conclusion.

Time is very tight; please do not put this off, but respond even if you do not consider yourself an 'activist'. We do want your considered opinion.

M.L.Somers
President, SBKA
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Tim Lovett
Chairman SBKA