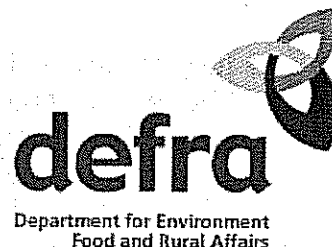


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Our ref: MC77519/MA  
7 April 2008

From Jeff Rooker  
Minister for Sustainable Farming and Food, and Animal Welfare

Dear Dr. Lucas,

## BEE RESEARCH FUNDING

Thank you for your letter of 26 March about research funding for beekeeping.

Funding for Defra's bee health programme is £1.3 million each year and this has remained at the same level for the last five years. A further £192,000 is being spent by Defra on bee health Research & Development which is comparable to previous years. Bee health also benefits from other research projects such as those on the impact of pesticides on pollinators and those looking at biodiversity. However, there is an ongoing review of expenditure on all Defra programmes, including bee health, and the level of funding for future years cannot be guaranteed.

On 12 December 2007, I met the British Beekeepers' Association which represents the hobbyist beekeepers, and Ian Gibson MP to discuss their demands for considerably more funds to be allocated to bee research. I explained that Defra was under extreme financial pressure and there was no possibility of additional funds being made available for bee research or the bee health programme. The Association was obviously disappointed at this news but unfortunately demands for substantially increased funding are unrealistic in the current financial climate.

Decisions on the priorities for future activities and the levels of funding that support them need to be considered on the basis of a clear strategy in relation to bee health policy. This is why we are developing a bee health strategy with stakeholders which will set out the objectives and priorities for the bee health programme over the next 10 years. This approach should make the best use of available resources. It is intended to publish the strategy this summer.

We are fully aware of the situation in the USA which has been called 'Colony Collapse Disorder' but we currently have no evidence to suggest that similar conditions apply in the UK. However, Defra's bee scientists at the National Bee Unit (NBU) are in contact with US scientists in order to find out the latest information about research into the cause(s) of the disorder. They are also investigating any cases of higher than normal colony loss for which a ready explanation, such as starvation or the failure of Varroa treatments, is not available. It is not unusual for some colonies to be found dead or absent at the end of winter, particularly when the previous season has been poor. A small number of losses has been reported to the NBU this year and these are being investigated. Results so far indicate that the majority of the losses are due to poor Varroa control.

Varroa is now endemic throughout the UK and whilst it remains a serious problem for beekeepers, management of the mite has now become a routine part of bee husbandry. We recognise that in recent years, mite resistance to certain varroacides has become a problem. However, beekeepers need to adapt the control measures applied when resistance is discovered, and use authorised treatments in conjunction with other controls during the year, ideally as part of an Integrated Pest Management approach. A comprehensive advisory leaflet on this issue is available from the NBU. Experience shows that it works.

Finally, in recognition of the potential threat presented by the Small Hive Beetle, Defra is developing contingency measures for the introduction of exotic pests and diseases of bees in England and Wales. In addition, research into the biology and detection of this pest is part of the Defra funded research programme.

P.P. W. Bookler

**JEFF ROOKER**