



agriculture

Department:
Agriculture
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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Mr. John Moodie
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Dear Mr Moodie

Advisory notice

American Foulbrood (AFB) in the Western Cape

As many beekeepers will know, the Plant Protection Research Institute (PPRI) of the Agricultural Research Council has recently been surveying honeybee colonies and retail honey in South Africa for the presence of American Foulbrood (AFB), an extremely serious brood disease of honeybees as a project for the national Department of Agriculture. This is an extremely serious brood disease of honeybees, caused by the spore-forming bacterium *Paenibacillus larvae*, and has thus far never been reported in sub-Saharan Africa. In other parts of the world AFB has caused large-scale colony losses, is extremely contagious and very difficult to eradicate, and has been the subject of extensive eradication and control programmes. It is also the major reason why honey and other bee products entering South Africa are required by law to be irradiated, in an effort to prevent the disease from entering the local honeybee population.

The bad news is that AFB has now been found in some colonies and some apiaries in the Western Cape. The disease has been confirmed using all standard diagnostic tests, and the identification is considered to be entirely reliable. At present it is not known how serious or extensive the disease outbreak is, but a precautionary approach requires that we consider there to be the potential for a full-scale AFB outbreak in South Africa, and to act accordingly.

The steps that the national Department of Agriculture (DoA) will take are as follows:

- (a) To conduct an urgent yet extensive delimiting survey of the Western Cape to determine how widespread and extensive the AFB infection is, and particularly, whether it is present in the wild honeybee population. This survey will be conducted by PPRI, assisted by DoA inspectors from the Directorate Agricultural Product Inspection Services (APIS). In addition, beekeepers may be requested to assist with the survey.
- (b) Once the extent and distribution of the AFB presence is known, the DoA in consultation with organized beekeeping and other stakeholders will decide on the appropriate course of action to be followed. This is likely to entail an attempt to quarantine and eradicate the disease.

In the interim, beekeepers are strongly urged to adapt extreme precautionary measures so as to not spread the disease further, and to prevent their apiaries from contracting the disease. This applies to all beekeepers in South Africa, but particularly those in the Western Cape. The suggested measures are as follows:

- (1) Beekeepers should endeavour to keep all apiaries distinct from each other; that is, do not move honeybee colonies from apiary to apiary.
- (2) Beekeepers should not place their colonies in the near proximity of colonies belonging to other beekeepers.
- (3) Do not move equipment (brood boxes, supers, frames) from apiary to apiary, or from colony to colony.
- (4) Sterilize all beekeeping equipment (hive tools, gloves) with alcohol or boiling water after use, so as not to spread the infection from apiary to apiary or from colony to colony.
- (5) Do not put out wet supers for bees to feed from.
- (6) Do not feed colonies with anything containing honey or pollen.
- (7) Keep robbing to an absolute minimum, and hence, keep beekeeping management to a minimum.

Beekeepers who consider that their colonies are either infected with AFB or that colonies have shown any extreme foulbrood symptoms in the past 6 months, are urged to contact Mike Allsopp at ARC PPRI (021 887 4690; 083 288 5059; allsoppm@arc.agric.za) to arrange for colony inspection or alternatively Mr. Jan Hendrik Venter at the DoA : Directorate Plant Health (012 3196384; 0723488431; janhendrikv@nda.agric.za). Typical symptoms of AFB are discoloured and sunken brood, with the diseased larvae or pupae forming a black or brown scale at the bottom of the cell, and with the diseased larvae having a muscous-like (non-granular) texture and being extremely ropy, before it dries to form a hard scale. Entire brood frames can be affected, giving the frames a shotgun-like appearance, and badly infected colonies are likely to collapse and die.

Thank you for your cooperation

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Alice Baxter', written in a cursive style.

Alice Baxter
DIRECTOR PLANT HEALTH