

DISEASE ASSURANCE SCHEME FOR HONEY BEES

DASH Update

Keith Morgan, National Bee Unit

By now, many of you will be aware of the DASH scheme which was set up in 2013 in collaboration with the Bee Farmers' Association (BFA).

The scheme is a result of the Defra Farming Regulation Task Force Implementation – Earned Recognition Plan, which aims to find ways of reducing the administrative burden of regulation on those who have a strong track record of reliability and adherence to standards. The Defra Farming Regulation has already been in effect for some time and this risk-based approach is already in operation in the livestock sector.

DASH

Through the DASH scheme, which started four years ago, the NBU and BFA hope to:

- reduce the costs associated with disease within commercial beekeeping operations
- improve the health of honey bees within the operations
- reduce the regulatory burden in the form of inspection visits.

So far, 69 bee farmers have passed the DASH scheme and been responsible for treating or destroying 257 of their own colonies affected by foul brood diseases. This has enabled the inspectors to concentrate on beekeepers and bee farmers not on the scheme.

Audits

As with any assurance scheme, we have set in place a three-year audit of all bee farmers on the scheme. This involves random checks of a member's apiaries and colonies, checking their level of biosecurity, veterinary medicines records and, in some cases, taking a mandatory honey sample.

In 2017 we carried out the first audit visits and were very pleased with the outcome. Some members had minor non-conformities, which were dealt with. Those who passed their audit will not receive a further one for another three years.

However, if any bee farmer feels they need assistance, advice or help with aspects of the scheme or the statutory functions of their operation, then we would of course still be there to help as normal.

Any bee farmer found not complying with the rules of the scheme or having a significant number of serious non-conformities will be suspended or removed from the scheme.

Training Days

Another benefit of DASH is that it allows students or apprentices employed by bee farmers to attend the DASH disease training days. This ensures that the people dealing with the bees have the same ability to spot disease as the owner. So far, 12 apprentices have passed the training day.

When a bee farmer joins the scheme after passing the assurance day, all his/her apiary sites must be registered on BeeBase and, during the summer, a bee inspector will inspect all these apiaries. This checks that the bee farmer is able to spot disease without missing any. It also checks his/her biosecurity practices and gives some extra training in the field.

Once the bee inspector is satisfied that everything is OK, the bee farmer is a full member of DASH.

Improver Days

In 2016, we ran two improver days for bee farmers. These involved looking at diseased comb, inspecting hives for disease and exotic pests, carrying out a shook swarm, and checking methods of destruction and sterilisation of bee equipment.

This year there will be an improver day for bee farmers thinking of joining the scheme, giving them some hands-on training similar to that received by bee inspectors.

We feel these improver days are a must for any bee farmer who has never attended an inspectorate's Bee Health Day. The actual DASH Assurance Day may be a daunting prospect, especially for someone who has had little or no bee disease experience, so the improver day acts as a gentle taster session.

Healthy Bees Plan

DASH is part of the Healthy Bees Plan which is due for review. Initial indications suggest the scheme has been a success, freeing up bee inspectors to concentrate on visiting other beekeepers and undertaking exotic pest inspections. These are especially important now that small hive beetle is present in Italy and the Asian hornet has become established on mainland Europe.

The next audit visits will be in 2018, and the last few baseline inspections from 2017 will be completed. We will then be able to assess and measure the success of the scheme better.

Future Plans

We hope to go forward with the DASH scheme and build on it as we move beyond the scope of the first Healthy Bees Plan. It is too early to consider what shape the successor to this may take, nonetheless DASH is one aspect of the original Plan that has allowed better targeting of inspection resources while reducing the regulatory burden on bee farmers who are willing to demonstrate competent disease and pest management within an assurance scheme. 🌱

The DASH Assessment includes the ability to recognise disease in the comb and distinguish it from other brood disorders

