

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Bee concentration camps

Great articles by Eric McMullin on the bee-mandarin issue (June *California Farmer*), giving both sides of the problem.

Assembly Bill 771 that seeks to impose severe restrictions on beekeepers' ability to earn a living is currently being considered in Sacramento. But as McMullin points out: *"Anything passed will likely be so watered down as to be ineffective — or will be repealed (or watered down) as soon as legislators learn what they passed."*

This whole situation could have been avoided if growers with the current problem varieties (those that set seeds in the presence of bees) had exerted due caution before planting these varieties. It was well known that bees caused seeds in these varieties in both Spain and Morocco, and growers were warned to isolate the varieties from other citrus pollen sources. Two large growers ignored these warning signs and did not sufficiently isolate their plantings, not from bees, but from other pollen sources. Smaller growers followed suit, likely figuring "these guys must know what they're doing." There has been a "planting panic" of these problem varieties by growers who ignored the warning signs.

When seeds were first found in the initial plantings in the Maricopa area (southwestern Kern County), the large growers were surprised and initiated a campaign to cleanse the area of bees. This campaign was successful and bees were relocated to California's citrus belt — the east side of the San Joaquin Valley from Bakersfield to Madera. There was some grumbling on the part of beekeepers, but by and large the relocation was amicably done. Now, growers of problem varieties want bees cleared within two miles of their citrus belt holdings, but there is a vast difference between the approximately 10,000 acres of citrus in the Maricopa area and the approximately 250,000 acres in the citrus belt. Clearing the citrus belt (or a good portion of it) of bees would represent the final solution for California's bee industry.

A few prescient beekeepers cried "appeasement" when beekeepers moved out of the Maricopa area. Appeasement can embolden those appeased. Some have made the analogy to Hitler's territorial march through Europe, but let's not go there (unless I just did).

Smaller mandarin growers encouraged to plant problem varieties are now being urged to support the likely illegal provisions of AB 771. Some may follow the leaders; others may take to heart the adage: "Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me."

Fortunately, there are solutions to the current impasse. The unfairly maligned Satsuma mandarin has been around for years and is seedless in the presence of bees and pollen. In a side-by-side com-

parison, Satsumas came out ahead of Clementine mandarins in both ease of peeling and flavor. (The test was done on my kitchen table — try it yourself.)

Here are some ideas:

Banish the name Satsuma, replace it with Cutie and back it with all the promotional efforts that have gone into marketing Cuties.

Top-working represents another solution. Top-working of trees and vines is completed by nectarine, peach, plum

and grape growers all the time as new, improved varieties come on line. New mandarin varieties that are seedless in the presence of bees (and pollen) are coming on line.

Relocating 300,000 bee colonies from California's citrus belt or concentrating them in smaller and smaller areas (concentration camps) is impractical, unwise and likely impossible; it isn't gonna happen. Twenty years from now, when all mandarin varieties in California will

be seedless in the presence of bees, this current imbroglio will be viewed as a brief but unpleasant chapter in the long history of cordial relations between beekeepers and citrus growers; and among citrus growers that supported AB 771 there will likely be a mutual consensus: What were we thinking?

*Joe Traynor,
manager, Scientific Ag Co.,
Bakersfield*

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