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L. Illingworth

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BEE DISEASE LEGISLATION IN OTHER COUNTRIES

By L. ILLINGWORTH, M.A.

IN the short time at my disposal I can only deal with one foreign country, Switzerland, and it will hardly be possible to do more than give you a brief description of the system in force there with little or no comment.

About the beginning of the present century Swiss beekeepers became alarmed at the increase of brood diseases in their country. They first of all tried to get the government to deal with it, but without success. One prominent politician, indeed, remarked that they would become the laughing-stock of Europe if they attempted to legislate about bee disease. The beekeepers, however, said that if the state would not help they must do something themselves, and an insurance scheme was suggested. This met with considerable opposition, mainly on financial grounds, but was finally carried by a small majority at a general meeting of the Verein Deutsch-Schweizerische Bienenfreunde (V.D.S.B.), or German-Swiss B.K.A., and put into operation in the year 1908.

Before describing the scheme let me invite your attention to the chart showing the results achieved.

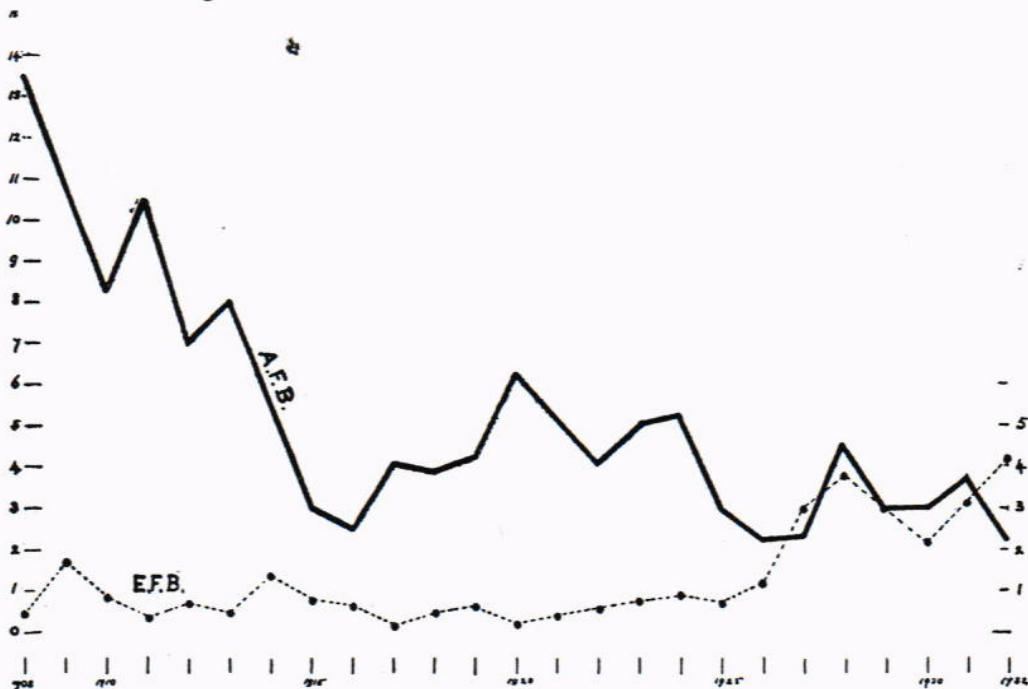


Fig. 2.
Prevalence of foul brood in Switzerland since the insurance scheme came into effect.

Thus it will be seen that when the scheme was started in 1908, out of every 1,000 insured beekeepers 13.5 had American foul brood (*B. larvae*). A year later this figure had been reduced to 11, and the following year to slightly over 8. The Swiss Government now recognized the good work, and in 1910 passed legislation dealing with bee diseases. The existing Association Insurance Scheme in German Switzerland was allowed to go on as before, the control of it being left in the hands of the beekeepers, but in French Switzerland, where no scheme existed, the government set up one, so there is a dual system at work, a government insurance scheme in one part of the country, and an association scheme in another, though the association system has proved more economical to run and gives further advantages to the beekeeper. In later years American foul brood was reduced to a little over 2 per 1,000. The same success has not attended the efforts to control European foul brood. Though there has never been a great deal of it in Switzerland, a glance at the chart shows that it has been slowly but steadily increasing since 1920, and the more rapid rise in recent years is causing concern. The explanation is probably to be found in the different nature of the disease, and the fact that it is not so well understood, nor has any particular method of treatment been found to prove effective in all cases.

I will now proceed to describe the scheme. By the resolution carried at the meeting of the V.D.S.B., foul brood insurance was made obligatory since 1908 for all members of the association. Any kind of legal compulsion was, of course, out of the question, but from that time no one could enjoy any of the privileges of membership until he had paid his insurance premium in addition to his annual subscription. The premium was fixed at one halfpenny per colony per annum. The Association pledged its funds, and no doubt received donations and guarantees from sympathisers, to form a compensation fund, but did not call in the aid of any insurance company or receive any assistance from the government. It kept the whole thing in its own hands. Compensation is made on a liberal scale. It may be as much as £4 per colony, but averages £1 5s. (All figures are calculated at the par rate of exchange before Britain went off the gold standard.) Combs destroyed are paid for according to their age and value. Compensation for bees is reckoned according to the strength of the diseased colony, not the stage which the disease has reached, at a rate which varies according to the time of year and corresponds to the value at which the same quantity of healthy bees could be bought. This encourages early notification of disease.

The organization consists of a head, who is a member of the central executive committee of the association, and is responsible to the whole association for the working of the insurance scheme. This position has been held since its inception by Dr. Leuenberger. Under him are the bee-disease inspectors. They are all experienced practical beekeepers and correspond more or less to our association experts. They are required to meet from time to time to receive

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special instruction and to discuss their work with each other, so as to keep in touch with the latest scientific and practical developments in all things concerning bee disease. Finally the association has about 130 local, but not independent branches, distributed all over German Switzerland, the smallest (Davos) with 20 members, the largest with over 300. In each of these branches there is a local (voluntary) foul brood Officer, usually the local secretary. It is the duty of the local officer to collect the insurance premiums and to send the money to headquarters.

Now let us see how the system works. Suppose a beekeeper discovers what he imagines is a case of foul brood in his apiary. If he is a member of the association, and therefore insured, he must inform his local officer at once. The latter makes an appointment to visit the apiary when the owner is at home. Together they examine the suspected stock, and the local officer, in the presence of the owner, cuts out a piece of comb containing the suspected brood, puts it in a tin and sends it to the Bacteriological Institute at Liebefeld. Nothing can be done until the report of the Institute is received—a most valuable provision, as it protects the beekeeper from undue or incompetent interference. If the presence of disease is confirmed the bee-disease inspector is notified; he visits the apiary by appointment, so that the owner can be present, and takes with him the local officer who called before. All three proceed to the apiary and the inspector examines all the colonies, decides which require treatment and how, and proceeds, with the assistance of the local officer, to assess the compensation due in accordance with the printed scale drawn up by the association. A report is made and sent to Dr. Leuenberger, who, when he is satisfied that the inspector's instructions have been carried out, pays the sum due to the beekeeper. Practical assistance would be available for novices or any beekeeper unable to carry out the work. At first the association offered compensation at half rates to uninsured non-members found to have diseased bees, on condition that they were allowed to clean up the apiary. This was discontinued in 1910, when the government included bees in the Diseases of Animals Act, and made regulations regarding bee diseases.

The insured beekeeper receives payment at the full rate for the time of year if a colony is destroyed. If the bees are saved by the artificial swarm method for American foul brood, then he receives 50 per cent. of their value, and if they are treated for European foul brood by the dequeening method, without destroying the bees or combs, 25 per cent. of their value and 6 francs for every queen destroyed.

When the Swiss Government passed legislation for the control of bee diseases it simply made the association inspectors government officials with power to enter any apiary suspected of harbouring disease. They are now appointed by the government on the nomination of the Bee Keepers' Association, and have a dual capacity. The

association still pays for their training and the work they do in connection with the insurance scheme, the government only paying for the actual time spent in inspection.

The insurance system, as worked in Switzerland, secures the two main objects which every successful method of controlling disease must aim at. It encourages early notification and provides an effective organization for dealing with cases of disease. It always seems to me that a policy of "burn the lot," which does not provide some form of compensation, might tend to encourage some types of beekeepers to conceal disease and tinker with unscientific nostrums in the hope of curing their bees and saving them from destruction.

The German-Swiss Association had only 7,000 members in 1908. It now has nearly 18,000. Or to put it another way, when the scheme was started its membership represented 42 per cent. of all the beekeepers in the association territory; now it is 90 per cent. At the present time the profit on the insurance scheme amounts to £2,000 in the hands of the association, all beekeepers' money, which can be used in any way the association likes for the benefit of beekeeping. A splendid and successful scheme, as I think everyone must admit.