



Editorial

The truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

The story may or may not be apocryphal but we all seem to have heard how George Washington, as a boy, had a beating off his father when he told the truth about the fate of the family cherry tree:

“Father, I cannot tell a lie. I did it with my little hatchet”

The moral of the story is, of course, that telling the truth is imperative whatever the consequences. Truth is good and therefore lies are bad - quite clear, black and white - but is it? Can a lie bring about a good result?

Recently a road tanker travelling near one of the townships of South Africa overturned spilling its cargo of golden brown liquid into the road. Children were on the scene immediately to enjoy the sweet bounty, scooping up the fluid with anything that came to hand.

Word spread across the beekeeping world almost as rapidly as the descending hoards of children came to the roadside - a load of honey had been spilt. The rumours grew. It was an import of Chinese honey. Then fired by the internet, a war of words developed between the bee farmers and the honey importers. Much was brought out into the open and a report by AfriCompliance has helped to keep the debate focused and deal with realities not speculation.

It is unlikely that local producers will ever be able to meet local demand but more could undoubtedly be done to promote the home product. It has made a lot of people think and hopefully in the end this will be to the commercial benefit of South African beekeepers. All this from one tanker spillage which turned out to be apple juice not honey after all.

We all know the formula $E = MC^2$ although we may not understand the theory. Equally we all can attribute the formula to Albert Einstein.

Even more than that, Einstein has for most people become the archetypal scientist who we can all visualise with his wild hair, large droopy moustache and sparkling eyes -

a little bit crazy but also loveable, a family figure, a favourite uncle perhaps. So every word uttered by this key figure of 20th Century science must be significant and equally certainly true.

“If the bee disappeared off the globe then man would only have four years of life left”

This Einstein quotation only came to light half a century after his death in 1955. A somewhat surprising time delay for such a weighty statement. Surprising also that it comes from a man who spent his life embroiled in the theory of quantum physics and maths not from a biologist or agronomist. Finally, surprising that it came from a man who, for most of his latter years, dwelt on a regret that he had not gone into the family shoe repair business after seeing the devastation that his theories could bring about in the form of nuclear weapons.

However, the world’s press loved it.

Very few of us professionally involved with bees escaped a phone call from some eager reporter who would ask question after question and then, the next day, we would read all our own words in a story under someone else’s name in the newspaper. But it was those stories that penetrated all the right places: governments, agricultural planners and funding authorities, even the White House, with a result that money became available for bee research all over the world. More than that it became a cause which the general public took to heart. People thought about bees, wanted to have plants for bees in their gardens, nests to encourage solitary bees appeared in all sorts of unexpected outlets. Above all there was a huge surge in wannabe beekeepers.

The quotation did not come from Einstein so whoever attributed it to him lied on a global scale but what a positive result!

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Editor