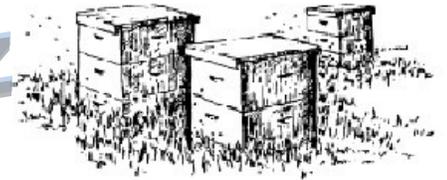




Fort Bend Buzz

newsletter of the
Fort Bend Beekeepers Association



November, 2016

The November 8, 2016 meeting of the Fort Bend Beekeepers will be held at 7:00 pm in Fort Bend County's "Bud" O'Shieles Community Center, 1330 Band Rd., Rosenberg, Texas. Visitors (and new members) are always welcome (membership dues are \$5.00 for the calendar year). The Association provides coffee and lemonade for meeting refreshments while members volunteer to bring snacks. Thanks to Tracey Grimme who volunteered to bring salty treats and Norman Harris (something sweet) in November. The meeting will be called to order at 7:30 after 30 minutes of social time. Once again, no one volunteered to give our opening invocation this month. If you can help with this, please see President Daryl Scott before the meeting.

Ask a dozen beekeepers...

Here is this month's Q (from one of our members) and an A:

Q: I want to be a beekeeper! My plan is to be ready for my bees in the spring and, in the meantime, I'm researching and reading all that I can. Can you help me with the rules or restrictions on keeping bees in my back yard?

An A: Welcome! Joining your local beekeeping association and attending meetings is a great way to get started. You will find that beekeepers love to offer up lots of advice as you are getting started. Most of it is an effort to avoid someone else making their mistakes, so you'll need to come up with your own!

As you know from your internet research, it is difficult to find any prohibitions, regulations or minimum requirements for hobby beekeeping. On the State level, permitting and inspection by the Texas Apiary Inspection Service is focused on pests and disease in commercial operations, mostly the movement of hives in to, out of, or around the state. While Fort Bend County has none, there are a few nearby jurisdictions with requirements for beekeepers. We understand that Bay City, Pasadena and Lake Jackson have beekeeping ordinances. Nonetheless, you may have contractual restrictions against backyard beekeeping: carefully read any neighborhood deed covenants that you may have. We are not aware of any

neighborhood's homeowner association that enforces any specific beekeeping restrictions and it is very unlikely that beekeeping is mentioned in the contract that you signed. Sometimes permitted "pets" are defined and barnyard animals (honey bees?) are often prohibited. In any case, you cannot be a nuisance so it is very important that you are a good neighbor by being a safe, responsible, successful beekeeper. Docile bees, a discrete hive location, aggressive swarm prevention and providing a continuous source of water are a few of the important responsibilities of the back yard beekeeper. "Don't ask, don't tell" is probably good advice.

A successful backyard hive may produce more than five gallons of honey each year. Requirements for what you do with your back yard honey can become a problem. You have options, but you need to be aware of what Texas food safety law has to say about all that.

Honey falls into a gray area. It is not termed a "raw agricultural product" like fruits or vegetables since it must be removed from the hive, extracted from the comb and bottled to be sold or given away. Texas has a "cottage food law" that permits the sale of home-prepared foods. There is a very specific list of "cottage foods"; honey isn't on it.

The Texas Department of State Health Services regulates honey entering our food supply through its

rules, permitting and inspection of "food manufacturing facilities".

In 2015, the Texas legislature rejected honey as a "cottage food" and exempted "small honey producers" from food safety law. Up to 2,500 lbs. of honey (200+ gallons!!) can be produced and sold without inspection or permitting so long as very detailed requirements are met. The law also prohibits local jurisdictions from regulating honey sales. The law reads "sells or distributes" so it would be wise (and not too difficult) to follow the requirements even if you give your honey away. Under Texas law, the honey must be produced by the beekeeper and must be "pure honey" that is "raw" (not defined) and has not been blended with anything. There are very specific labeling requirements, including the disclaimer "Bottled and packaged in a facility not inspected by the Texas Department of State Health Services.". (The Texas Beekeepers Association sells a bottle top label with this disclaimer at low cost.) "Small producer" sales must be "directly to consumers at the beekeeper's home, a farmer's market, a farm stand, or a municipal, county, or nonprofit fair, festival, or event".

Food safety is an important public health concern and hobby beekeepers should obey the law. For all the gory details, read the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension publication EFN-047 "Selling Honey in Texas" available online or from the Extension office.

Treasurer's Report

Our October treasury balance was \$2,507.88. We've collected dues from two new members (\$10.00) and spent \$36.79 on new batteries for our PA system and an extension cord for our meetings. In addition, Wells Fargo credited \$10.00 to our account from their 2010 - 2015 audit. It is not clear where this came from, but we thanked them of the donation. The resulting treasury balance is \$2,491.09, consisting of \$50.00 in cash for change and \$2,441.09 in our checking account.

October Meeting Notes

The head count looked like 54, but we only had 48 members and guests signed in at our October meeting. We welcomed several first timers that are planning on getting bees in the spring.

After social time, Daryl Scott opened our meeting with an invocation and led us in the Pledge of Allegiance. We expect volunteers to help with this role, but again we had no one willing to step up for this important part of our meeting.

Daryl thanked Alice Benson and Michael Pawelek who brought treats for the meeting. For his October "fun facts" Daryl reported on the honey bee's incredibly developed sense of smell and eyesight.

As beekeepers we all know that a honey bee's antennae are far ahead of a human's nose. An interesting aspect of this is that each colony has its own unique odor that the bees use to identify their home as well as each other.

Honey bee eyesight is incredible as well. A human can process an image in 1/50th of a second. A bee can do it in 1/300th second, so a movie or a television image looks more like a "slide show" to a honey bee!

A honey bee has five organs on its head that we can refer to as "eyes". There are two large compound eyes, one on each side, plus three other light sensing "ocelli" on the

top of its head. The large eyes gather images of their surroundings. The ocelli are simple eyes used to navigate to and from the hive.

The structure of the honey bee's compound eye indicates that they perceive color in wavelengths from orange and yellow to blue to ultra-violet. Red color is invisible and probably seen as black. Ultraviolet light is not visible to humans but is bright at the center of many flowers to help guide bees to their blooms.

Like humans, bees recognize and remember patterns in their vision, important in finding forage and their way back to the hive. Honey bees have even been shown to recognize human faces! Maybe your bees recognize you!

Daryl also reminded us that this time of the year we should be well into our winter preparations, doing varroa treatments, assuring adequate honey stores and making preparations to repair or replace equipment over the winter. Members were also reminded of the Texas Beekeepers Association Annual Convention is being held in Belton, Tx. November 3-5. The registration deadline is very near.

Also coming up is the 2017 North American Beekeeping Conference and Tradeshow, a joint effort by the American Beekeeping Federation, the American Honey Producers Association and the Canadian Honey Council. This is a great opportunity to attend a world-class event being held in our backyard. The five day event features presentations, workshops and a vendor trade show.

Daryl's final announcement was a quick update on our mentoring program that is now into its second year.

Jack Richardson gave a quick look at his plans to "right size" his beekeeping efforts. He expects to have quite a few nucs and 10-frame hives available in the spring. He is also planning a honey container order if any one wants to share shipping costs. Finally he has more that 200 pounds of beeswax that he would

like to sell.

Gene deBons reported on honey market information gleaned from the recent American Bee Journal. The U. S. hive count was up 8% last year, but imports increased 60%! Some imported honey said to be from Viet Nam sold for only 73 cents per pound. It appears that "Chinese honey" is a manufactured product that relies little on bees.

Ian Hertl with the Fort Bend County Health and Human Services Department gave an update on Zika and beeyard registrations. They have recorded seven Zika cases in the County (all travel related). It appears that Zika vaccination research is progressing quickly and cooler weather will soon reduce mosquito numbers. Beeyard registrations are coming in and you can still register at the County website.

Again we have run out of room to announce our door prize winners. Thanks to the donors and congratulations to the lucky winners.

Election Time

November 8 is the long awaited election day! We plan an election of officers for 2017 at our November meeting. Please contact Gene deBons (home 281 341-7135, office 979 793-2900 or email res-sol@consolidated.net) for details if you can serve.

TEXAS A&M
AGRI LIFE
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