

FCBA NEWS

Franklin County Beekeepers Association

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Happenings

Club Upcoming Scheduled Events

Beginner Beekeeping Basics Classes: March 3, 10, 17, 24 - Time: 6:30 – 8:30 - Location: Ag Heritage Bldg., 185 Franklin Farm Ln., Chambersburg, Room 7-8

Beginner Beekeeping Field Day: April 9th 1-4 PM (weather permitting) Location: Sempowski Apiary - 2003 Philadelphia Ave. Chambersburg

Spring Meeting: May 19th 6:30 pm, Ag Heritage Bldg

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Remember to pay your club dues, you can mail dues to: FCBA, P.O. Box 341, Chambersburg, PA 17201. Dues are still only \$10 year.

Our Winter meeting was held Feb 17th. We were glad to see 30 members in attendance. Robert House gave an excellent talk on spring plans. Robert confessed he has been beekeeping for 12+ years, so he has been through many spring bee seasons.

Nathan Wingert led us in a trivia session after Robert's presentation. After the trivia session there was a question and answer session. It seemed there was a good time had by all.

Inspired by Robert's discussion I decided to go along with his line of information, for this month's newsletter.

Local Honey to Sell Request

The Winery at The Long Shot Farm is hosting its 2nd annual Spring Craft Fair in the vineyard April 23rd and 24th.

"In addition to the 30+ vendors we intend to participate, I'd love to have a local honey booth set up where guests can connect with and purchase from a local beekeeper." We're outside Carlisle.

Contact: Rachel Weyant
rachel@thelongshotfarm or 717-713-1434

Early Spring Inspection (February – April)

As soon as you finally get a break in the weather, it would be a good idea to get out to the bee yard and check on your bees.

You'll want to wait for a day that doesn't have wind and has temperatures hovering around 55°F degrees or above. On a day like that, you should have little to no fear that your brood would die from the cold while inspecting the frames. Even still though, you'll want to be relatively quick about your inspection.

During the early spring there are 3 main activities that you'll be doing:

- Looking for signs of life
- Checking for your queen
- Feeding bees

Looking for Signs of Life

If you are a new beekeeper, going through your first winter as a beekeeper can build up a bit of anxiety. The long cold months can raise questions like, will my bees survive? Did I do everything I could to prepare them for the winter? Will I have to start over? All of this is uncharted territory for a new beekeeper, but no matter what happens -- learn from it and keep moving on. Experienced beekeepers also are wondering if their bees made it through the winter.

When the weather finally breaks, one of the first things you'll be able to determine when inspecting your hives is if your bees have survived the winter or not.

Your bees will likely be in a cluster located at the top center of your hive. This is the area in your hive that collects the most heat.

When you crack open the inner cover you should see them gathered there. If not, it is still possible that they may have moved down just a bit, so take out a frame or two to check if they are there.

If your colony is nowhere to be found, then you may have had a late fall swarm or a dead-out.

A dead-out is a euphemism that beekeepers use when their hive has died. The most common culprits are condensation, varroa mite load, starvation or from getting too cold. These aren't the only reasons though. As a beekeeper, it would be beneficial for you to learn from what happened and to determine if there is anything you could do to change the outcome for next year.

Ideally you want a cluster that is as large or larger than a grapefruit. At this size a colony can maintain enough heat to keep any brood that may be laid warm.

Autopsy the Honey Bee Colony

It's important to note the time of year your hive died. If your hive died over the winter it may have died from condensation, starvation or cold which is typical in a winter killed hive. Nosema Apis is also more common in the winter when bees cannot get outside to defecate regularly. If your hive collapsed in the fall, varroa could be the culprit as the population of varroa is usually highest then. Performing an autopsy of a honey bee colony is like solving a mystery and a variety of clues must be found and considered together, before you can make a final analysis of what happened to your hive.

Is there a queen present? Are there eggs and open brood in the cells? Do you see a lot of varroa on the bottom board or on capped brood when you remove them from their cells? Do the bees look healthy or are they deformed. Did the bees die with their heads in the cell, butts sticking out? Are the capped brood punctured with holes and sunken in? Are there brown or yellow stains all over the outside of the hive, hive opening and/or inside the hive? Does the hive seem wet, is there a lot of moisture in the hive?

Checking for Your Queen

Bees can survive without their queen. Especially the fatter bees that the queen produces right before winter hits. These fatter bees have an extended lifespan. While normal bees would live 4

to 6 weeks, these winter bees can last 4 to 6 months instead.

To figure out if she is still around, you'll have to go through a few frames to try to find her. If you find your queen while inspecting your hive, fantastic! If not, you have a few different options. You can order a new queen; take a frame of brood from another colony; combine hives; or wait a week or two when the weather is nice again and look a second time.

One good sign that your queen has survived is that you see brood being laid. Although that is not a 100% confirmation that she is in the hive. Sometimes, you can have laying workers and you'll have to know the difference.

Spring Feeding Your Bees

Even though the early spring inspection is supposed to be quick, be sure not to miss this crucial step.

While you're lifting frames to check for the queen and estimating how large of a cluster you still have, check out your bee's food stores.

March and April are notorious for having unpredictable weather that can starve a hive. Many hives still have to rely on the honey they have stored away. So, unless you left enough honey on your hive, you might find yourself needing to give them a little extra food.

If you end up determining that your hive does not have enough food, you'll need to add some. A good suggestion is using the Mountain Camp Sugar Method for feeding bees in spring. This method uses dry sugar as a way to feed your bees. Dry sugar is an excellent bee food for the winter months and early spring because it doesn't freeze up. No matter how cold it gets the bees will be able to chip away at these tiny granules and feed on them.

Is It Really Possible to Make Money Beekeeping?

While the profit potential can't be argued, there are many factors that can have a negative impact on your bottom line. That said, it's no riskier than any other crop.

Like most types of farming, you're at the mercy of the weather & climate change, diseases, predators like the giant European Hornet, and other factors. Focus on what you can control and build a strong colony that can better deal with things you can't control.

There are many ways to make money with beekeeping that most new and for-profit beekeepers aren't aware of.

1. **Selling bee products** – Honey, wax, pollen, propolis, candles, lotions, balms and more.
2. **Selling pollinator services** - great for beekeepers that have at least 50 hives.
3. **Selling bees** - sell a nuc, a package of bees or queen bees.
4. **Bee removals** - How much you charge for your removals is up to you.

There are several other ways to profit from your beekeeping efforts in combination with honey production that will give you a better chance to succeed. In fact, one of the most popular and profitable methods is by selling bees, queens, and nucleus colonies. This does require you to slowly build a market for your bees, but it can be more profitable than honey production and quite a bit less work.

Get ready, Spring is around the corner!