

Hitting the Honey Jar

When students returned to one Midwestern college last fall, they found that the familiar honey jars in the dining room were gone.

Around the same time, honey—a flavoring in tobacco products—

was also a subject of conversation at an international tobacco conference.

The reason? The demand for honey is on the increase...and production is not. As a result,

honey prices have recently gone up sharply.

Last year, honey prices for U.S. producers were the highest they've been since 1947. At 31¢ per pound, they were 44 percent higher than a year earlier. Total value of the crop in 1972 was \$67 million.

Meanwhile, the number of bee colonies has been trending down since the late 1940's. Last year, there were slightly more than 4 million colonies of bees compared with 4.7 million in 1965.

U.S. honey production last year totaled 215 million pounds, compared with 242 million pounds in 1965.

The waxing demand for honey is related to increased demand for "natural" foods generally, both in this country and abroad.

USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service reports that in the past decade, major countries importing honey have stepped up imports by 45 percent.

World production, however, has increased by only about 9 percent.

Thus honey prices on the world market climbed steeply throughout 1972, reflecting the expanded demand.

West Germany continued to be the largest importer in the comparison of net imports for 1960-64 and 1969-71.

But the big news was that Japan and the United Kingdom, rather than West Germany, were the major recipients of the 65.7 million more pounds of honey imported in major countries from 1960-64 to 1969-71.

Japan accounted for nearly 45 percent of the increase, the United Kingdom, for 22 percent, and the U.S., for 13 percent. West Germany accounted for but 10 percent of the increase in imports over the decade.

During this period, the U.S. changed from a net exporter of honey to a net importer. In 1960-64, the U.S. averaged yearly net sales of more than 5.6 million pounds. During 1969-71, net purchases averaged 3.1 million pounds.

Then, in 1972, gross U.S. imports of honey hit 39 million pounds, surpassing a record set in the early 1940's. Net imports totaled nearly 35 million pounds.

The world's largest exporting countries are Mexico, Mainland China, Argentina, Canada, and Australia. However, production in these countries has not as yet responded to world demand, indicating prices will continue to be high.

Commercial apiaries—those with 300 or more colonies of bees—accounted for about 55 percent of U.S. production last year. They had 1.6 million colonies producing 118 million pounds of honey, with a yield of 73 pounds per colony in the U.S. last year averaged less than 53 pounds.

California and Florida led all States in production. California's 500,000 colonies produced 24.5 million pounds of honey, especially from blossoms of alfalfa, wildflowers, and some citrus. Florida's 350,000 colonies,

depending mainly on citrus blossoms, produced 26.6 million pounds of honey.

Other leading producers were South Dakota, Minnesota, and Texas.

Total honey production in the U.S. was up 9 percent over 1971, although it was 14 percent below the production for 1962.

It has gone down over the years partly because low prices have driven a number of beekeepers out of business.

However, the recent surge in demand won't necessarily result in as sudden an increase in supply.

The major factor in honey production—almost an all-controlling one—is the weather. Bees gather nectar to make honey, and there are a number of weather conditions under which nectar flow is restricted—particularly when it is cool and wet.

Last year, weather was generally more favorable than in 1971, especially in North and South Dakota. Late summer rains brought on sunflowers and other late blossoms and made possible an excellent crop.

The use of pesticides has also affected honey production in the U.S. Over the past 6 years, USDA has paid out \$6.5 million to beekeepers for production losses due to pesticides under the Beekeepers Indemnity Program.

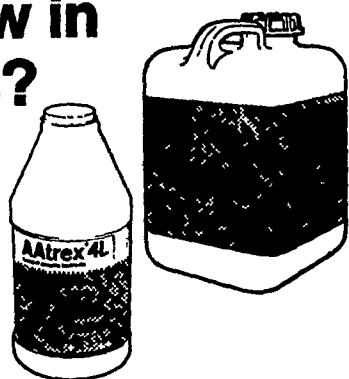
Another factor is the lack of floral sources in the U.S. Beekeepers say they have nowhere to place new apiary sites. Only so many hives can be put in a certain location for efficient production.

Many beekeepers do earn additional income from leasing their colonies to farmers for the pollination of crops.

About 3 million acres of crops valued at \$1 billion annually, are dependent on insects—primarily honeybees—for pollination. These include many of our fruits, vegetables, and legumes.

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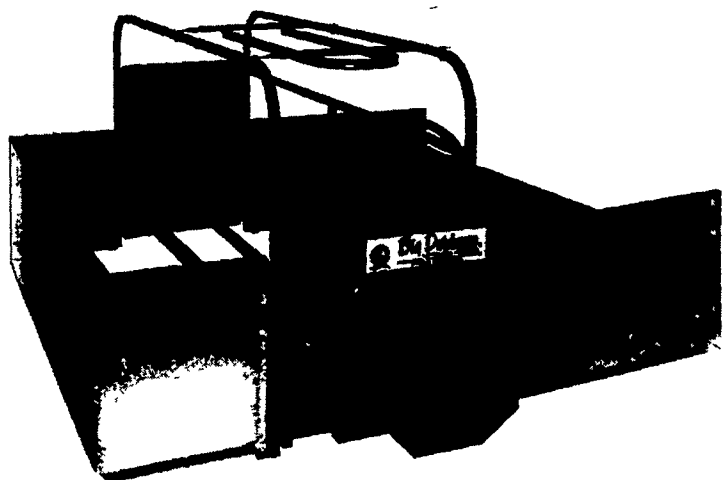


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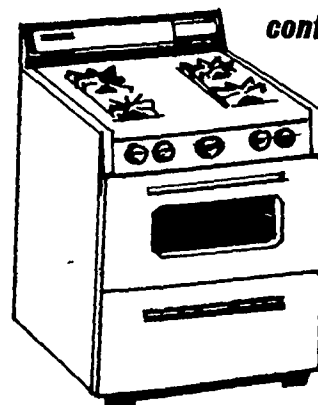
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