

# Mt. Joy Farmer Busy Extracting Honey

by Sally Bair  
Farm Feature Writer

Wilbur N. Erb, Mount Joy RD1, is involved in some sticky business these days — he's busily extracting honey from some of his beehives.

Erb is really a dairy farmer, milking about 50 head of Holsteins, but about five years ago he caught a swarm of honey bees in Rheems and since then he has added to that initial swarm and has about 23 hives.

Erb figures his interest in bees is hereditary because "my great-grandfather kept bees before I was born. I heard a lot about it and I was always interested in it."

Erb has his bees scattered at five locations, and he is now extracting only a portion of the total honey crop. He wouldn't hazard a guess as to how much honey he extracts in a year, but he did say that he got 19 gallons out of three hives recently.

He explained that many people extract honey twice a year. He said he finds his honey is lighter in the early summer when there are alfalfa, locust and dandelion blossoms for the bees. Towards fall the honey tends to be darker.

How does one extract honey? The initial step, of course, is to collect the frames from the beehives. Erb says he uses protective gear (but has been stung anyway). He says bees do not sting light complexioned people so readily. Another method of taming bees for working with them is to quiet them with smoke. Fire is a dreaded thing among bees, he says, and so when they smell smoke, they fill up with honey (so they'll have a supply if the hive is burned), and when they're full, they simply can't move so quickly and they're not as likely to sting.

"Uncapping" is the next process. That means skimming the wax off the frames by the use of an electrically heated knife, in Erb's case. He says some people use steam-heated knives. Then the frames are inserted in a centrifugal extracting machine, and after a lot of hand cranking of the machine, the honey is out of the frame. At this point the Erbs strain the honey twice, and then it's ready to eat.

Mrs. Erb says the whole family loves it on toast, and she has many recipes using honey in baking and cooking. They do extract more than enough for their family, so they sell some in quarts and gallons to friends and neighbors.

Erb says he started working with bees as a hobby, but as his numbers increase, it's becoming more time consuming and more of a business. He said that today people are "really looking for hives" and it is getting very difficult to obtain frames or wax.

He also explained that apiaries must be inspected once a year by the state to ensure that no hives are carrying disease. Any hive harboring disease is destroyed by fire.

Erb is a member of the Lancaster County Beekeepers Association. He farms about 180 acres, and in his spare time he is an avid chess player. He carries on quite a few games by correspondence, so he always has a partner and a game underway.



Erb checks one of the frames in the extractor to see if the honey has all been extracted.

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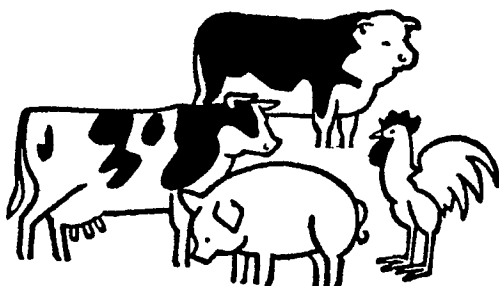


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