

Though she owns no bees, she loves promoting honey

BY SALLY BAIR
Staff Correspondent

Barbara Graybill Beiler is sweet on honey, and likes to buzz about its good qualities and the value of honeybees.

She's having lots of opportunity to do just that as president of the Lancaster County Honey Producers where she is making history as the first woman president since the organization was begun in the early 1900's.

What is a little unusual is that Barbara currently owns no bees of her own. As a former Pennsylvania Honey Queen, she has maintained her interest in the industry which she learned about from her father, Edward, who has several hives. Last year he served as the group's treasurer.

Barbara explains, "My Dad had bees and I helped him with his. I am interested in bees, so I just continued my membership in the Honey Producers. Now I have my husband interested." In fact, she has her husband Dale so interested, that they are presently looking for a swarm to purchase to have in place before spring.

She and Dale live in the borough of Manheim but plan to locate their hive on Dale's parents' four acres.

While she may not have her own bees, Barbara is very knowledgeable about the honey industry. She says the Honey Producers currently have about 60 members, and is open to anyone interested in bees. In fact, it is often referred to as the Lancaster County Beekeepers.

The organization welcomes new members, and Barbara says it is a good way to get to know more about bees before deciding to go into beekeeping. While there are many helpful books written on beekeeping, she points out, "Bees never do what books say they'll do. You have to know a little before you begin or you won't do well."

The meetings which are held from March through October offer an informal time to talk over problems with experienced members. Barbara says raising bees to produce honey varies from place to place. "I think Lancaster County is a fairly good place to

raise bees. Most of the beekeepers here are only hobbyists, and they have from one to 25 hives. None is doing it as a living," Barbara relates.

There is a good market for honey, and Barbara says that most people who produce honey could sell more than they produce. "My father could sell six times the amount he has," she says. One reason honey from hobbyists is so popular for honey lovers is that it is usually not heated to as high a temperature as commercial honey and therefore has more body," Barbara explains.

When questioned about the differences among the kinds of honey like buckwheat, alfalfa, orange blossoms and wildflower, she says there are distinct flavor differences and the label comes from the greatest concentration of flowers within a two-mile radius from the hive. That is the distance a bee will wander from the hive. "The lighter honeys are sweeter," she explains, "and are similar to corn syrup or King syrup. The darker honeys are more like blackstrap molasses. Most people around here say their honey is wildflower in the spring. The honey will be very light. In the fall it will be medium in color."

When she traveled as Honey Queen, Barbara noticed some regional preferences as far as color and taste are concerned. "Here alfalfa and orange blossom are very popular. They all wanted buckwheat in northern Pennsylvania."

Barbara says honey is good for you because it has vitamins and minerals in it and it is not as refined as sugar. Since it is sweeter than sugar, less honey can be used as a sweetening agent.

She adds, "Honey is easy to store. Just keep it at room temperature in a dry place and it will keep a long time." The only thing that occasionally happens is that it will crystallize, and then it simply needs to be warmed to allow the crystals to melt, and then it can be used again.

Of course lots of people think honey is a delicious product, but there are many who dislike the

honeybee, the one responsible for that goey rich. Barbara explains that honeybees are beneficial in ways other than producing honey. They are extremely important to the farms and orchards of Lancaster County and as Barbara says, "They pollinate everything from fruit trees to cucumbers."

She feels the biggest problem is that people don't know the difference between honeybees and yellow jackets, and feel a dislike toward all bees. "What we'd like to do in the beekeepers association is to preserve a yellow jacket, a wasp and a bumble bee along with a honeybee, and show people the difference. We like to be very helpful in displays," Barbara states.

The organization's main purpose is "educational and promotional," according to Barbara, each year they have an exhibit at Landis Valley Harvest Days and at Farm-City Week at Park City. Wherever they go, they like to take along an observation hive, showing the inside operation of an actual hive. "It is a wooden frame with glass. I like to have that. People can actually see the bees".

Lancaster County's group annually prepares an exhibit for the Farm Show and has taken first place two years in a row. They traditionally place in the top three spots. In preparing the Farm Show exhibit they study pictures of past displays and try to gain ideas from each. "We have something to represent beeswax, fruit to represent pollination and cookies or bread along with honey products," Barbara says. They also exhibit products from about eight of the county's beekeepers.

With spring coming, beekeepers will be ending their dormancy along with their bees. When temperatures consistently reach the 50s and 60s the entrance reducer which cut down the size of the opening to protect to dormant hive over the winter will be removed to allow the bees some freedom. It is then that the beekeepers find out how their hives came through the winter.

Barbara says, "Bees keep a very clean hive. The waste products from their bodies are only deposited outside the hives."

She speculates that this has been a relatively good winter for bees, saying that an ideal situation for winter months is for it to stay really cold for three weeks, then



As the honey producers' first president, Barbara Beiler will be leading the group's promotional and educational efforts throughout the year. Here she makes plans for the first of the group's meetings which begin in March and conclude in October.

warm up so the bees can move to another frame for honey. Bees are active only when the weather is warm, and if it stays cold for an extended period of time the bees will not move and could starve, even if there is honey very close to them. She says that bees remain in a cluster inside the hive, surrounding the queen bee. The outside bees slowly move to the inside to get warm, and the inside bees slowly move to the outside of the cluster. The process continues throughout the winter.

Having your bees successfully winter over is not an easy matter. "You have to know how much honey to leave in the hive. In some places they need 40 pounds, but we usually leave about 60 pounds in

the hive for the winter." Barbara relates.

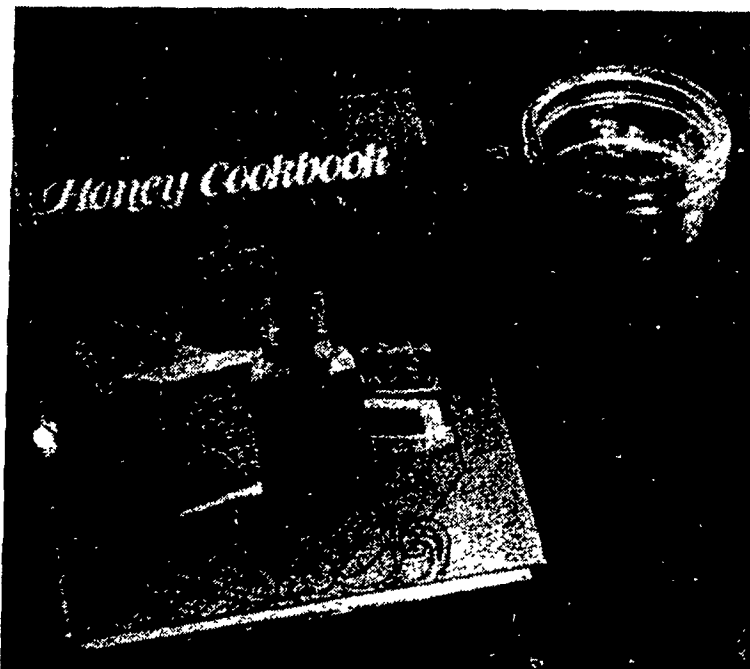
She adds that some beekeepers feed sugar water to their bees in the spring. "While they can't make honey from that, it nourishes their bodies to get them ready. The 'honey flow' starts when flowers are blooming," Barbara says. "It gets them going quicker when they have their bodies nourished."

Weather is an important factor in producing honey, and Barbara says last year was a good one because it didn't rain when the flowers were in full bloom. If it rains or is too dry, the honey production will be low.

A good, strong hive, according to Barbara, can have from 40,000

(Turn to Page B4)

Homestead Notes



Honey has many virtues and versatility is one of them. Many recipes can be adapted to use honey, and Barbara Graybill Beiler looks to this honey cookbook for new ideas.

Substitute honey for a distinctive taste

For unusually flavorful cakes, glazed vegetables and meats, try cooking with honey.

You can substitute honey for sugar in any baking recipe, but you may have to make some adjustments to attain a standard product.

In recipes that use a great deal of sugar such as fruit breads or cookies, you can replace up to half the sugar with honey without having to change the proportions of other ingredients, she says.

If you want to replace all the sugar in such a recipe, reduce the amount of liquid ingredients by one-fourth cup for each cup of honey used. Also, reduce the baking temperature by 25 degrees F, and add one-fourth teaspoon of baking soda per cup honey. Baking soda will neutralize the acidity of the honey and increase the volume

of the finished product. If your recipe already calls for baking soda, there's no need to add more.

A recipe made with honey may

brown differently than one made with sugar. This is because of the color of the honey and the way it reacts to heat.

