

Adams County beekeepers form association

BY JUDY HULL

BIGLERVILLE -- Inferring that someone has "bees in their bonnet" is not usually meant to be taken as a compliment. To members of the newly formed Adams County Beekeepers Association, however, it is probably one form of praise they like to receive.

Organized within the last six months, the association, according to Herb Schroeder, Biglerville, president of the group, invites membership or visitation to anyone interested in bees and beekeeping.

"Some people come to our meetings just because they are interested in bees while other members keep bees commercially," he said. The number of hives owned by some members varies from a few colonies of bees up to one member who owns 430 hives.

The association meets monthly for programs and to discuss concerns of beekeepers. Current topics of interest to the group include the problems caused by the large amount of imported honey into the U.S. Schroeder explained that U.S. beekeepers must pay 27

cents a pound or more to sell honey to other nations, while honey imported into this country carries a tariff of only one cent per pound.

"U.S. beekeepers can't compete," he said, adding that while the government does have a price support program for honey, importation is such a serious problem that some honey packers have been forced to trim their operations.

Hobbyist beekeepers in this country number 200,000, according to Schroeder, and they provide a great majority of the honey which consumers purchase. While most people think of bees only in the spring and summer, beekeepers are busy year round maintaining hives and extracting honey.

Beekeeping or bee hunting as it was known historically, dates back to 7000 B.C. in eastern Spain. The art of keeping bees developed haphazardly through the centuries, but finally got the formula it needed to succeed in 1851. At that time, a Philadelphia minister, Rev. L.L. Langstroth, discovered the secret to modern beekeeping - bee space.

Langstroth found that by building hives which provided the



Herb Schroeder, Biglerville, president of the Adams County Beekeepers Association, draws honey from the bottom of a settling tank. Because honey is a dense substance, it settles to the bottom of the tank. Schroeder keeps his money in 60 pound plastic containers.

necessary space for bees, honey could be extracted in reusable, movable frames. The standard Langstroth hive consists of ten frames placed inside the body of the hive which has a brood chamber and a number of supers or additional levels which may be determined by the size of the colony.

Supers may also be used for brood rearing or food storage depending on the size and activity of the colony.

In Adams County, many people relate bees with pollinating orchards in the spring. While it is true that bees are needed to successfully pollinate the fruit crop, the work of the bees is much more widespread. According to Schroeder, bees pollinate 90 different crops.

"One-third of our total diet comes directly or indirectly from insect pollinated plants," he said.

Honey, the end result of the bee's work, is a sweetener different from what consumers usually think of as sugar. "It's a left-handed sugar,"

Schroeder stated, "and in some people it is more digestible."

Beekeeping is a year-long and rather involved process. And while most beekeepers pursue the interest as a hobby, it is a serious undertaking and one which requires a good amount of time and equipment to be done properly.

In simple terms, bees gather nectar and make it into honey or wax. Beekeepers take surplus honey from the hives, extract it, and prepare it for consumer use.

Schroeder explained that August and September are the prime months for extracting surplus honey, but it can be done at other times if the frames are mechanically heated. He noted it is very important that only surplus honey be removed from the hives since the bees need honey to survive during the winter months.

Once a beekeeper removes a frame of honey from a hive, the first step in the extracting process is removing the wax capping which the bees have placed over the honey to preserve it. Uncapping is done with an electricity or steam heated knife by moving the knife from the top of the frame to the bottom. The wax falls into a tub and the uncapped frame is placed in an extractor.

Schroeder explained that the extracting process is carried out through centrifugal force. When the basket of the extractor is full of frames, a hand or mechanical force turns the basket causing the honey to be forced out of the frames.

"The bees build the combs very precisely and evenly so the honey is forced out as the basket turns," he said.

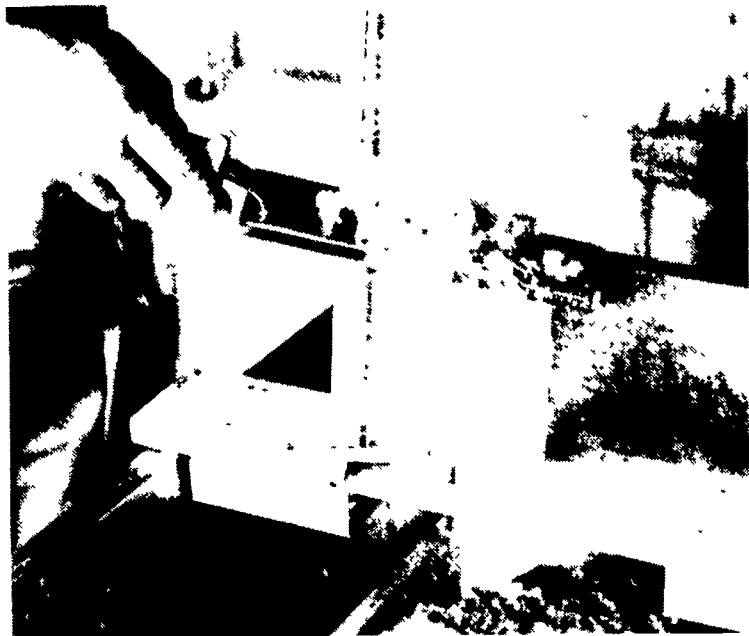
Once the honey has been removed from the frames, it is moved by pump to a settling tank where it is left for about one week.

"Because honey is a very dense substance, it settles to the bottom of the tank," Schroeder went on to say. It is then drawn from the bottom of the tank and put into 60 pound plastic containers or 55 gallon drums for storage until bottling.

Schroeder said honey can remain on the hives indefinitely, but once it is removed it should be extracted.

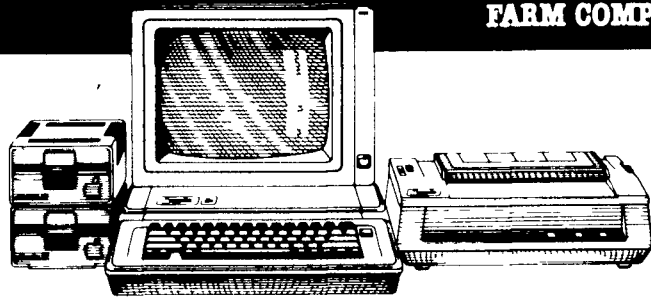
"Honey readily draws moisture which could lead to fermentation and dilution of the honey," he said. Also, when the honey is no longer cared for by the bees, it will eventually granulate, he went on to say. The bees work to maintain the

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Removing the wax cappings from the frames is the first step in the extracting process. The bees place the cappings over the honey to preserve it naturally. The wax must be removed with an electrically or steam heated knife.

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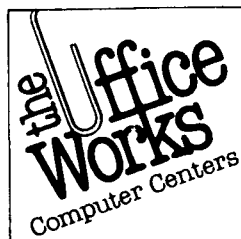
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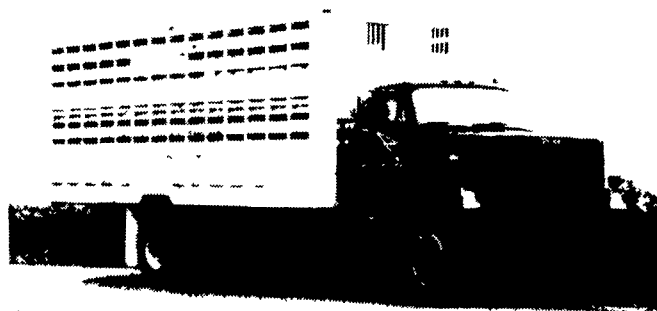


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