

Dave Hackenberg turns bees into a 'blooming' business

BY MARGIE FUSCO
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LEWISBURG — Dave Hackenberg is on the road again. But he's not alone. Although his wife, Linda, and their four children are still home, Dave has lots of company...about 19 million bees.

Dave's Buffy Bee honey business, headquartered in Lewisburg, moves south in November. His bees will spend a busy season pollinating citrus fields around Dade County, Fla. Then they'll return north to yield sweet orange blossom honey. From there it's Adams County for apple pollination, then a summer full of wildflower, goldenrod, and about eight road trips around the state and as far away as Maine or the Dakotas.

"When we were in Future Farmers, Dave did his project on bees," a Mifflinburg high school classmate recalls. "Everyone said, 'That's nice, Dave, but what are you going to do for a living?'" What Dave did was turn those first hundred beehives into a blooming business and became an industry activist.

Although Dave intended to be a farmer, his sights were initially set on conventional farming, dairy or veal. But after-effects of a serious farm accident caused his father to cut back on his operation and eventually sell the farm. Dave turned to beekeeping for his project, and his career began.

When he graduated from high school in 1966 Dave found part-time work with the soil conservation service and eventually became a state bee inspector. But he was working to get his bee operation established. His break came in the late 1960s, when crown vetch became popular.

The Penn State-developed ground cover was in demand for highway projects across the nation. And crown vetch could be pollinated only by bees. Hooking up with a Philadelphia firm, Dave expanded to 1,300 hives. By the time the crown vetch boom slowed, Dave had established the contacts to continue as a full-time

beekeeper with a crop pollination and honey business.

Today Buffy Bee is located in 6,000 square feet of processing plant and warehouse near Lewisburg. Dave's 1,300 hives, scattered across the local countryside, produce between 200 and 250 barrels, or 13,000 to 16,000 pounds of honey a year. Dave is also getting a reputation as a breeder and sells nucs, starter hives for bee operations, as well as beekeeping products and beeswax.

Buffy Bee is a family operation. Dave and his wife are fully involved as well as their sons, ages 12 and 13, who help out when they're not in school. Dave's father operates the 18-wheel truck that helps move the hives on long trips. The firm also employs three or four people part-time in peak seasons.

Things aren't always humming in the bee business. "This year we're doing OK, but last year..." Dave's voice trails off and he looks away and shrugs. Despite a good local market for their preservative-free honey, it's hard to make a living at honey production.

The main problem, according to Dave is imports. He notes that on the world market honey sells for about 30 cents per pound wholesale. But in the United States it costs about 45 cents to produce a pound of honey. Rather than imposing trade restrictions on honey imported from Canada, Mexico, South America, and China, the U.S. government offers domestic beekeepers price supports.

Like many beekeepers, Dave finds price supports an unsatisfactory alternative. Although the government pays slightly over half a dollar a pound for honey producers, Dave explains, "I'd rather sell my honey on the open market than be used to offset the federal deficit."

Unlike some producers, Dave is trying to do something about it. He is a state representative and a national board member of the American Beekeeping Federation. He speaks eagerly about the group's Honey Promotion and

Education Act. "It's a market order to promote the honey industry the way the dairy industry has done." He looks forward to the act reaching a vote and admits it's frustrating to see the wheels of government turn so slowly in helping beekeepers.

"As it stands now," he says, "a lot of producers don't know if they'll be in business from one year to the next. You can't live that way. If it weren't for pollination, our part in citrus and the food industry, congress would probably have kicked us out a long time ago." He sees a need for honey producers to market their product aggressively, to build a stronger domestic market.

As the head of an interstate operation, Dave has some other concerns as well. Some of the smaller problems are bears that raid local hives and freezing weather in Florida. Among the larger concerns are bee mites and "killer" bees.

"I don't know if I'm really worried about 'killers' or not," Dave admits. He's in a unique position to talk about these bees, which developed from crossbreeding African with honey-producing bees. In the early '70s, Dave was involved in the U.S. Department of Agriculture experiment with Africanized drones. "We had a lot of problems with them," he says. "They were mean, nasty, didn't make much honey. We bred the stock out fast."

Mites, which invade the bees' breathing tubes, are a more immediate concern. It's not so much



Linda Hackenberg shares Buffy Bee honey with the young visitors.

the mites as the reaction to them that Hackenberg fears. "They just came to light about 18 months ago," he says. "No one knows why they occur or how much damage they can do, but they don't seem to affect the honey." He's afraid the

U.S.D.A. will over-react to the mites and begin destroying hives. "I hope the government doesn't act too quickly on this or it's going to be like the avian flu. It'll drive more producers out of business."

Wayne County 4-H names outstanding boy, girl

Josh Sheard and Kyra Gadomski were named the outstanding 4-H boy and 4-H girl for 1985 in the Wayne County 4-H program. This selection was announced at the 4-H Achievement Night held recently at the Honesdale Presbyterian Church Hall in Honesdale.

Josh Sheard, from Boyds Mills Road, Milanville, is a four-year 4-H member in the Calkins 4-H Ag Club. Josh has served as president of his 4-H club and also is president of the Wayne County 4-H County Council.

He has attended 4-H Capitol Days in Harrisburg, 4-H Leadership Congress at Penn State University, the 1985 4-H Citizenship...Washington Focus Program in Washington, D.C., 4-H Careers Trip to Penn State University and has been a camper and a 4-H camp counselor at 4-H Camp Shehaqua at Hickory Run State Park.

Josh also participated in the Pennsylvania Pork Producer's Council Public Speaking Contest at the Pennsylvania Farm Show in 1984. His main 4-H project has been the 4-H market hog project, but he has also taken vegetable production projects. Josh is currently a junior student at the

Wayne Highlands High School.

Kyra Gadomski, from R.D. #5 Lake Ariel, is an eight-year 4-H member in the Ledge Dale 4-H Community Club. Kyra has been very active in her 4-H club and currently serves as a 4-H Teen Leader in the club. She is a five-year member of the Wayne County 4-H County Council, having served as secretary of this group.

Kyra is a five-year member of the Wayne County 4-H Livestock Judging Team has attended 4-H Leadership Congress at Penn State University. She also attended 4-H Camp Shehaqua as a camp counselor - in - training and participated in the 4-H Careers Trip to Penn State University.

Kyra has exhibited her 4-H projects at the Wayne County Fair, Greene-Dreher-Sterling Fair and the Pennsylvania Farm Show. She has taken a variety of 4-H projects including: dairy, market beef steer, capons, pet care, onions, melons, potatoes, wildlife, strawberries, and beekeeping. Kyra is a 1985 graduate of Western Wayne High School and plans to attend Penn State University in January, 1986 to pursue a degree in computer science.

Kyra also received a 1985 Isabel Loesch - Wayne County 4-H Development Fund Scholarship.

Also receiving a scholarship was Wayne Mang, R3, Honesdale. Wayne, a member of the Bethany 4-H Community Club, is a nine-year 4-H member. He has been active on the Wayne County 4-H Livestock Judging Team, is a member of the Wayne County 4-H Council, has been active in his 4-H Club, currently holding the office of president. He was a participant in the 4-H Careers trip to Penn State.

Wayne has taken a number of 4-H projects during his 4-H career, including market lambs, sheep breeding projects, gardening, flowers, arts and crafts and the hobby project. He has exhibited his 4-H projects at the Wayne County Fair and the Greene-Dreher-Sterling Fairs.

He received the Wayne County Outstanding 4-H Boy Award in 1984. Wayne is a 1985 graduate of Honesdale High School and is currently pursuing a degree in computer science at Penn State University, Worthington Scranton campus.



Dave Hackenberg has turned beekeeping into a profitable business.

Slice food budget by cutting your own meats

YORK — If you're looking for ways to cut the food budget, sharpen your knife and your carving skills. You can cut up your own chicken, slice your own lunch meat, even make your own lunch meat and stretch large cuts of meat into more than one meal.

The old geometric law—the whole is equal to the sum of its parts—does not always apply to chicken prices says York County Extension home economist, A. Joan Lamberson. Chicken sold whole always costs a few cents less per pound than cut up. The price difference between whole and cut-up will vary among stores, but it is usually ten

cents a pound. If you buy a four-pound bird, you save 40 cents by cutting it up yourself.

Retailers continually find new ways to merchandise parts so that it is next to impossible to compare values among the different packages of parts.

A money-saving idea to help reduce the meat budget might be to consider slicing your own cold cuts rather than selecting the prepackaged kind. Next time you see unsliced bologna or salami on sale compare the price with that of a presliced package.

If you like baked ham for luncheon meat, why not select a small

tavern ham at the meat counter. This will cost less than the baked ham at the deli department.

There are other things to consider—like how good are you at slicing and whether or not you want to take the time.

You could also prepare meat at home for luncheon meats. Compute the cost of cooked meats such as chicken, turkey and roast beef with the price of slice-to-order meats from the deli department and decide if it would pay you to prepare such meats at home.