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to harvest actually fermented.

"We learned quickly the importance of maintaining a proper moisture content in honey," Tim said. "Bees will not cap honey with a thin layer of wax until they have properly evaporated the moisture from the nectar, by fanning their wings. Since our bees were killed by mites, they had left much of the honey uncapped, which we extracted along with the rest."

Tim said it was their first harvest and we didn't want to waste anything."

Because high moisture content in honey allows for fermentation, "we ended up losing it all," he said.

Tim wrote in his business entry for 1994, "Oh well, some valuable lessons learned and some beeswax for the effort."

So in 1996 the Millers "started over" by purchasing two more packages of 12,000 bees. Since then, the numbers have continued to grow by collecting swarms, making splits (dividing one hive into two or more separate hives), and purchasing hives from fellow beekeepers.

Today Tim cares for about 100 colonies of about four million bees.

"He's classified as a part-time beekeeper," said Kelly. Part-timers manage 25-299 hives — yet even with those numbers, it is hard to make a living.

To make beekeeping a full-time occupation, Tim believes he would have to care for about 400 hives.

The development from egg to adult worker bee is 21 days, when she begins a life of labor for the colony.

One bee, noted Kelly, produces about 1/12 of a teaspoon in its lifetime. In the summertime, the life can be short — only about 6-8 weeks.

In building the hives, gathering nectar, and working for the queen, Kelly noted that a typical bee can "literally work itself to death."

Some of the best nectar comes from woodlots near flowering trees, especially in the early spring.

One of the first pollen sources is the maple tree.

Some of the Millers' hives are on vegetable and fruit production farms. One is a "pollination yard," Tim noted, on the nearby Nelson

Heisey Orchard. Yards can have anywhere from two to 15 hives.

The past year wasn't a good year for honey production, mostly because of the cold, wet spring. "There were too many birds and not enough bees," Tim said, which resulted in a poor cherry crop.

Kelly noted that this year the locust trees didn't bloom on their property, so nectar was in really short supply.

In 1999, the average yield per colony was 76 pounds. With 11 colonies, last year the Millers harvested about 800 pounds of honey. This year the yield is down about 60 percent per colony.

Spring weather "makes or breaks" yields, said Tim.

Often, colonies of bees split from the main branch and "swarm." The old queen leaves and the new queen remains.

Sometimes "swarms" can attach themselves to anything — trees, telephone or fence posts, even on the ground. Up to 60 percent of the hive can actually leave in the swarms.

Tim and Kelly have photos of swarms they collected from all over the area.

One swarm was on the

ground, in the grass. Tim merely placed a hive next to it and the bees simply marched right in.

One photo shows a fence post surrounded by a swarm. There have been stories of swarms literally attaching themselves to the spare tire in the back of sport utility vehicles — even construction barrel markers.

Kelly and Tim market the honey made from the hives under the Back Run Apiaries label, named after the Back Run Stream that feeds into the Little Chickies. Honey is packed into one- and five-pound bottles, including the squeeze bear plastic containers.

Colored waxes are made into decorative candles, including forest green and burgundy votives.

Honey can last a long time, noted Kelly. She read that

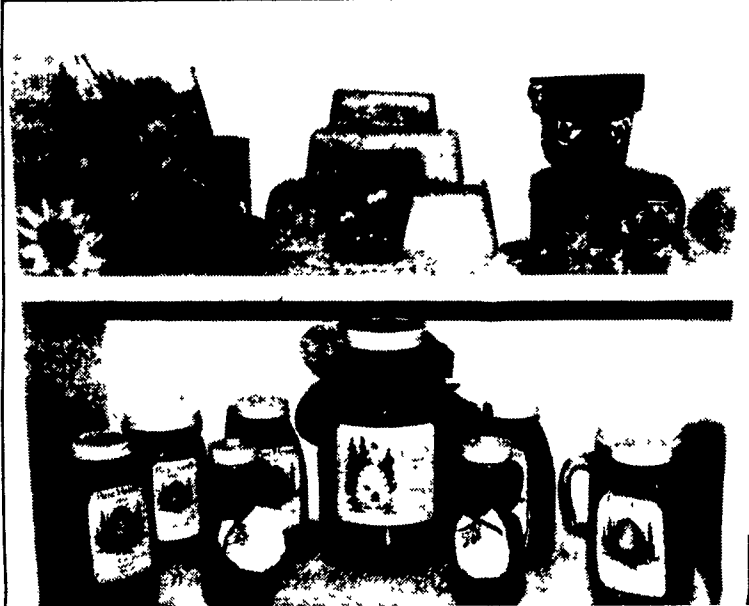
some was found in unedible, granulated form in an Egyptian tomb.

The Millers sell their honey and wax products direct-market, mostly by word of mouth. They managed a booth at the Elizabethtown Fair in August with help from Pennsylvania Honey Queen Renee Blatt.

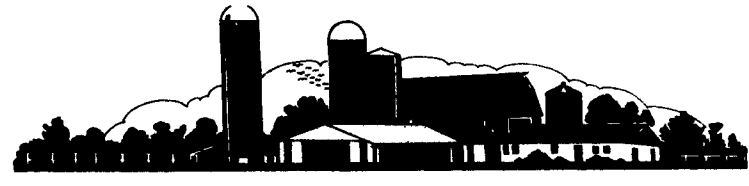
Kelly also managed a stand at the Landis Valley Harvest Days.

Kelly, president of the county beekeepers, said the association numbers about 35 members. They meet about six times per year.

Kelly and Tim are members of Landisville Mennonite Church, which they attend with children, Caleb, 7, in the second grade at Elm Tree Elementary; Elizabeth, in kindergarten at Elm Tree; Julia, 4; and Angela, 2.



The Millers market honey in one- and five-pound jars, along with an assortment of beeswax products.



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