

Home on the Range

Honey Sweetens Beekeeping Family's Prospects

LOU ANN GOOD
Food And Family
Features Editor

MANHEIM (Lancaster Co.) — Tim Miller's hobby is fast turning into a full-time job not only for himself but also his wife Kelly.

"Bees are fascinating creatures," Tim said of his reason for



Tim Miller examines one of his hives. The beekeeper processes about 30,000 pounds of honey annually with 7,000 pounds from his own hives.

purchasing a few bee hives several years ago.

In the beginning, his wife Kelly didn't share his affinity for bees. She saw his hobby as a distraction from spending time with the family that includes Caleb, 9; Elizabeth, 8; Julie, 6; and Angela, 4.

"He'd work 12-14 hour days at his carpentry job and then come home and work with the bees for an hour," Kelly said.

"I wanted to spend more time with the family too," Tim said.

"But I also liked working close to nature. Growing up, I always thought I'd be a farmer, and beekeeping was as close to agriculture that I seemed to be able to get. When the bees need work, you've got to do it."

The answer to their dilemma came in an unexpected way — expand. Miller was offered the opportunity to purchase Wampler's Honey, a well-known Lancaster County business and second largest honey packer in the county.

With the purchase came five acres, a large house and shop for processing honey and for developing new products.

Today, Kelly is president of the Lancaster County Honey Producers and abuzz with ideas to capitalize on honey and beeswax. She has founded The Honeybee Shoppe and makes handcreams, lip balm, and candles in numerous fragrances to sell locally and to beekeepers across the state.

The bees continue to be Miller's complete responsibility.

"Beekeeping and honey sales cannot support the family," Miller said. But he sees potential in diversification, which means pollination by moving his 190 hives into orchards and farms.

The bees travel from blossom to blossom in search of nectar, which transfers pollen from plant to plant, which fertilizes the plants and causes them to bear fruit.

The USDA estimates that about one-third of the human diet is derived from insect-pollinated plants and the honeybee is responsible for 80 percent of this pollination.

Miller works long hours in the spring. He begins placing his hives around the end of April in sites all over the county.

Orchards are not allowed to spray during the pollination period, according to Miller.

Miller harvests the honey in late spring to early fall. In the spring are orchard crops, followed by vine crops such as melons and cucumbers in May. Pumpkins are in August.

Some farm sites don't enable the bees to produce as much honey as others. Miller regularly examines the hives to ensure they are strong and the bees busy. He may need to move the hives to a location where there is a more abundant nectar source.

The color and flavor of honey varies depending on what blossoms the bees visited in search of nectar. Because of the floral sources, no two honeys are exactly alike in flavor, color, and nutritional content.

The most popular flavors the Millers process are alfalfa and clover, but they also sell buckwheat, orange blossom, tulip, and wildflower.

Honey color ranges from a faint golden tint to a dark amber brown. Generally lighter colored honeys are mild in flavor and the dark ones such as buckwheat have a strong flavor.

The processing equipment includes a warmer, strainer, bottling, and uncapping machine.

"Processing honey is not difficult," Miller said.

He annually processes 30,000 pounds of honey of which 7,000 pounds come from his own hives. The remainder is unprocessed honey he purchases from Dutch Gold Honey, Rohrerstown.

For consumers who question why honey prices have tripled within the last year, Miller explained that a shortage of honey nationwide has driven up the costs. Although he attempts to keep his prices down, his costs

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Honey adds natural sweetness to fruits of autumn harvest. Honey enhances homemade apple dumplings swimming in cream and jars of fresh berry jam.

Photo courtesy of Dutch Gold Honey.

Honey Queen Is Third Sister To Attain State Crown

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EPHRATA (Lancaster Co.) — From childhood, Erin Fisher seemed to be predestined to become the state's honey queen. She had two older sisters who filled the position.

But Erin said, "Growing up I always said that I wanted to be a beekeeper, not a honey queen. I wanted to get my hands sticky."

By the time she was 18 years old, Erin realized the honey queen position was a great opportunity to promote the honey industry.

As the third member of her family to attain the Queen Bee crown, Erin said that she had plenty of experience in helping her sisters with promotions and working with the industry.

She is the daughter of Paul and Sandy Fisher and helps with the family's Cherry Valley Apiaries in Stroudsburg.

The family has 150 hives that they use for pollination in area orchards and farms. They also bottle their own honey and sell in local stores.

"I started helping when I was four years old. I had my own bee suit and gloves and went along with my dad," Erin said.

When she was in first grade, Erin got stung on her eyelid. "It was traumatic but that helped me become brave," Erin said.

In sixth grade Erin had an allergic reaction and went to an allergist to become desensitized. She was given a series of shots of watered down bee venom to built up her immune system.

In high school, Erin got her



National Honey Queen Erin Fisher has a brochure of her favorite recipes for using honey. To request a copy, send a self-addressed, stamped business-size envelope to The Pennsylvania State Beekeepers Association, R.D. 1, Box 315, Canton, PA 17724.

own smoker to use to extract the honey from hives. She helps to deliver the bottled honey, but said that her favorite part of beekeeping is teaching others about it.

"It's a lost art in a sense, few people know anything about it but are interested," she said.

Erin is a member of the Monroe County Beekeepers Association.

She combines her beekeeping publicity responsibilities while studying nursing at Penn State University, University Park.

Those interested in booking beekeeping and honey presentations for schools and associations should contact Linda Hackenburg at (570) 568-2337.

Featured Recipe

One versatile ingredient to add flavor and a quick energy boost to snacks, main dishes, and desserts is nature's own sweetener — honey. With no additives or preservatives, honey digests easily, and enhances recipes for appetizers, marinades, vegetables, dips, glazes, pies, cookies, and pastries.

There are many different honey varieties, which actually give foods a different flavor. Orange blossom, clover, alfalfa, buckwheat, blueberry, strawberry, and many others are available. So experiment.

If your grocer does not carry a specific variety, write to the nation's largest packer of premium specialty honeys, Dutch Gold Honey, 2220 Dutch Gold Dr., Lancaster, PA 17601-1997, or call (717) 393-1716.

OLD-FASHIONED APPLE DUMPLINGS

- 6 medium-sized baking apples
- 6 refrigerated prepared pie crusts (unbaked)
- 1 cup brown sugar
- ¼ teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 cup wild flower honey
- 1½ cups water
- ¼ cup butter

Peel and core apples. Leave apples whole.

Cut each pie crust into a square, and place an apple on each. Fill cavity in apple with honey and sprinkle with cinnamon. Pull corners of dough up around apples, and pat dough around apples to cover completely.

With moistened fingertips, fasten edges securely. Place dumplings one-inch apart in a greased baking pan.

For sauce: combine brown sugar, alfalfa honey, water, and cinnamon in 1½-quart saucepan. Cook for 5 minutes over medium heat, then remove from heat and add butter.

Pour sauce over dumplings. Bake at 350 degrees for 35-45 minutes, basting with sauce occasionally until fork inserts easily into apple. Serve hot with milk or cream. Yield: 6 dumplings.

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For More Honey Recipes