

# It Takes A *Special* Touch To Examine Beehives



Troutman in action wears a bee veil but prefers to work with bare arms and hands. She said, "I have this theory: If you dress for war with gloves and long sleeves, the bees are more aggressive. Not wearing gloves forces me to be more careful with the bees. If I do something wrong, they let me know in a hurry."

**LOU ANN GOOD**  
Food And Family  
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**STEVENS** (Lancaster Co.) — Renee Troutman calmly removes a honeycomb from a bee hive. Bees swarm around her, but Renee doesn't appear to notice.

"I'm not afraid of being stung, although I probably will be a few times before I finish morning inspections," she said. "I have this theory: If you dress for war with gloves and long sleeves, the bees are more aggressive. Not wearing gloves forces me to be more careful with the bees. If I do something wrong, they let me know in a hurry."

So Troutman tackles her job as state-appointed apiary inspector with bare hands and arms but with a bee veil. It's her job to inspect every hive in the three-county area of Lebanon, Lancaster, and Dauphin counties at least once every two years.

Readers will probably remember Troutman as the former Pennsylvania Honey Queen, Renee Blatt, who went to national competition where she was selected American Honey Queen. As the representative for the U.S., she crisscrossed the states promoting the industry and encouraging beekeepers. After that, Renee filled an internship with the Department of Agriculture. Last fall she married Justin Troutman. Together they operate a dairy farm.

Renee helps her husband milk their 50 cows in the morning, then travels about 15 minutes to her parents' farm to help milk their 70 cows before she heads out to inspect bee hives.

All hives and apiaries must be registered with the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. The inspection service is a benefit to the beekeeper. It helps pinpoint problems, detect viruses in the beehive, and solve the problems.

"The most dreaded bee disease is American Foulbrood. The bacteria is highly contagious and will kill a colony and quickly spread to other hives in the area," Troutman said.

The bacteria is usually spread by bees robbing honey out of other colonies, especially if the infected hive becomes weak and cannot fend for itself.

The bacteria can also be spread by moving infected equipment from hive to hive or by purchasing used equipment that is infected with the bacteria.

The only cure for American Foulbrood Bacteria (AFB) is to burn all infected equipment. A preventative method is to treat hives with Terramycin, but some AFB strains are resistant to the treatment.

Troutman said, "Many beekeepers are unfamiliar with the symptoms of disease."

Troutman's trained eye quickly recognizes the larva that has died and exhibits a "ropy" condition. The healthy larva that was pearly white has sunk to the bottom of the cell and turned into a black, thick substance that can be stretched with a toothpick.

Troutman has found 15 cases of AFB since she began inspecting hives in May.

The diagnosis isn't made mere-

ly on Troutman's visual assessment. She inserts a toothpick into the suspicious-looking substance and has it tested in Harrisburg.

Troutman uses a smoker to calm the bees while she inspects the honey and the hives. Even so, several bees disturbed by her intrusion circle around her.

As she works, Troutman and the beekeeper whose hives she is inspecting discuss the appearance of the hive.

"There's your queen bee. She's beautiful," Troutman points to the large, honey-colored bee surrounded by hundreds of working bees.

Hives are "requeened" every two to three years. The queen bees are generally mailordered for \$17 each.

Troutman also examines the hive for honey distribution. A healthy hive has lots of bees, a solid brood pattern, and healthy, capped brood.

"When I'm inspecting, I look for punctured capping, indicating that the larva has died from a disease and the bees have attempted to open the cell to remove and clean up the dead larva," Troutman said.

Chalkbrood, a diseased larva that becomes mummified, is another common brood disease.

Tracheal mites, which can live and reproduce in the bee's breathing tubes, are microscopic and a big problem for beekeepers to eliminate. A sign to detect tracheal mites is when wings on one side of the thorax become detached.

Another virus beekeepers need to be concerned about is Sacbrood. The virus prevents bees from completing their larval phase and pupating, and the larva dies and quickly turns dark brown.

"Sacbrood is easily identified because the whole larva can be scooped out of the cell complete with its larval sac," Troutman said.

There is no cure or medicine for Sacbrood. Requeening and a good honey flow will sometimes clean up an infection.

Troutman has learned to identify many known viruses and fungi diseases.

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Working in tandem are Pennsylvania Honey Bee Inspector Renee Troutman and beekeeper Dennis Ernest, Stevens.

## Whitetail Wetlands Offers A Different Kind Of Getaway

**LINDA WILLIAMS**  
Bedford Co. Correspondent

**NEW PARIS** (Bedford Co.) — A farm with a never drying wetlands quickly brought farmer Jerry Fetter to the realization some land is not meant to be farmed.

Rather than fight nature, Jerry decided to take a lesson from his neighbor, Dr. Tom Dick, a veterinarian surgeon from Johnstown, and give a part of his land back to the wildlife by turning it into wetlands.

Jerry credits the thus far success of "Whitetail Wetlands" to manager, Connie Hunt.

Connie loves and has studied plants, flowers, birds, butterflies, and all the other wonderful acts of nature brought about by the wetlands.

"It is so sad to think that wetlands are disappearing at a rate of 275 acres per day," says this talented bundle of energy.

She is amazed at how quickly nature came in tune with the wetlands efforts and has identified numerous species of birds and dragon flies, plus ducks, tur-

tles, frogs, geese, snakes, fish, and mammals attracted by the return of nature to its own.

Connie oversaw the construction of a lodge, an addition to the original farmhouse which allows outsiders to see, photograph, hike, horseback ride, cross-country ski, and genuinely enjoy all aspects of the wetlands.

"It is a setting that offers no stressful schedules, no crowds, opportunity to commune with nature on a closely personal basis, to observe wild critters in their natural habitat," said Connie.

The lodge itself is uniquely and beautifully constructed. A large dining table provides a setting for dinners for about a dozen people, which Connie herself can whip up in the octagon-shaped kitchen.

Sliding doors enlarge the room for conversations and meetings.

Upstairs a wall of windows that overlooks the wetlands greets visitors. The room contains a self-playing baby grand piano or those with talented fingers

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Connie Hunt sits in the duck bedroom. Each bed has a locally-made quilt.