



# B-PLUS

BEEKEEPING REPORT FROM MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

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## **WINTER LOSS WINTER FEEDING**

So far this has been a very mild winter and loss of colonies should be much lower than in some years. However, most of the losses occur from late February to April as this is when the colony runs out of food. Now is the time to examine the bees to see where in the hive the cluster is located. If they are at the top then a shortage of honey may be indicated. There are a couple of things that could be done at this time. First would be to put on candy boards (See B-Plus No. 3 for directions on making of the boards.), and if the weather continues warm, and we have some flight days occasionally, then syrup feeding could be done as well. Syrup is best fed with inverted pails placed over the top bars of the colony as that way the heat from the cluster will allow bees to move up to the pail and return. Do not be overly concerned about opening a hive in cold weather as if you save the colony from starvation you would have more than made up for any loss from the disturbance. It would also be a good idea to add some fumagillin antibiotic (Fumidil-B or Nosema-X) to the syrup to control nosema disease.

## **PACKAGE BEES & QUEENS AND MICHIGAN'S TRACHEAL MITE QUARANTINE**

If you desire to replace winter losses with package bees, or to make divides with purchased queens, then you must get these from shippers that have been certified as mite free, AND from states that have not been de-regulated. At the present writing this means that you could not purchase packages or queens from the states of Florida and Texas, 17 counties of southern Georgia, and parts of California. Most other shipping states, such as North and South Carolina, Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana are on an individual basis, that is, each shipper must be certified as being mite free. This may mean that you will have to get your queens or packages from a source different than in previous years, so it may be important for you to place your orders soon, if you have not already done so. I suspect that the quarantine will be in place for all of this year unless the Michigan Dept. of Agriculture inspectors find many more apiaries and colonies infested with the mites.

## TRACHEAL MITE CONTROL?

Dr. William Wilson of the U.S.D.A. Westlaco, Texas laboratory thinks he (and others) have found some chemicals to control the tracheal mite. He also doesn't know, as yet, if the mite will cause any noticeable effect. At least if it does, we might be able to control the levels of the infestation if we can not eliminate it from our colonies. One of the chemicals used with good effects was Menthol. The nice thing about it is that it has already been cleared for use in food and food products so that its clearance for use around honey should be relatively easy.

## THE ECONOMICS OF BEEKEEPING

As some of you know that were at the MBA winter meeting, I have been working on a computer "spread sheet" analyses of beekeeping. It is now developed to the point where I can enter almost any reasonable number of colonies and project the costs and profit of the operation. Of course there are a lot of variables that could change from the operation that I have defined to your personal one. In the simulations that I have run from 1 to 5,000 colonies, one thing is very clear and that is that high average yields per colony (or apiary) are necessary if you are to make a reasonable return for your investment along with a decent salary for your time. I know that beekeeping is not all that different from most other agriculture pursuits in this regard as many farmers do not get both a salary and a good return on their investment. One thing in favor of beekeeping is that we have not had to invest in a lot of land to make our bees pay (more on that point in future issues of B-Plus). Since the yield per/colony (apiary) is important, what can, or should, we do about it? I think it is time that we did what the dairy industry has been doing for years and that is good record keeping on yields.

There are some dairy farms that are so automated that each cow is tagged and coded into a computer and when that cow stops being productive, for the effort to milk her, she is either bred to induce a new lactation, or is replaced by another cow. How many of us are so production orientated? Would we stop working or inspecting a colony or apiary if it did not produce to a minimum level? Would we replace it or move it? Breed (re-queen) it? I suspect most of us do not have the individual colony or apiary records that would allow us to be that decisive. I have often heard beekeepers say that if all of their colonies produced like their best they would have been happy (made money?). Of course there are lots of reasons that a colony or apiary does not make honey. But do you know what is the difference between the good producers and the poor colonies? Is it the queen, site, disease, poor combs, skunks, or moisture for nectar, as examples among some of the possible things that might affect a colony (or apiary). Sometimes a mile or two can make the difference in nectar secretion because of soil type or nectar plants.

I realize moving bees to a new location is not easy or without costs, however let's keep good enough records that we can rule out all of the other reasons, and then if the apiary is not producing we either have the choice of moving the bees or somehow increasing the amount of nectar producing plants. I think that with a little effort we all could increase our per hive average. Remember though, it takes more than just keeping the records, it also means comparing the differences carefully in order to make the right decisions regarding the colony or apiary.