The Alabama Cooperative Extension System Beekeeping Program – an Update

During October 2011, final agreements were reached between the Alabama Cooperative Extension System (ACES) at Auburn University and me (James E. Tew) to continue providing Extension and outreach programs for Alabama beekeepers, growers, homeowners, and gardeners. The agreement is a one-year contract, subject to annual renewal upon agreement by both parties.

In this capacity, I will conduct an annual spring meeting/workshop that will be conducted at Auburn University. Additionally, I will develop a web page presence, compose a seasonal newsletter, publish fact sheets, answer questions, and support the programs of the Alabama Beekeepers Association—observing Alabama beekeeping. Even though I have already conducted this program for the previous seventeen years, this will be the first year that I have done it without being on the staff at The Ohio State University. I retired from that position effective September 1, 2011.

Being a native Alabamian (Dothan) with part of my education from Troy and Auburn Universities, I understand Alabama beekeeping. I am anxious to make this Extension program a meaningful contribution to both new and experienced beekeepers. Please help by offering suggestions and continuing in beekeeping.

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WEBSITES FOR ALABAMA BEEKEEPING
- Alabama Beekeepers Association www.alabamabeekeepers.com/
- The Alabama Department of Agriculture (Dennis Barclift) www.agi.state.al.us/plant-industries/apiary-protection-unit
- Madison County Beekeepers www.alabees.com/buzz.htm

I have also established a Facebook page at www.facebook.com/onetewbee. Of course, anyone can follow the page, but I am particularly interested in having it be helpful to Alabama beekeepers.

If all goes well, I will be posting PowerPoint programs and moving media programs on YouTube.

OTHER USEFUL WEBSITES
- AgNic Bees and Pollination is a diversified page of information cosponsored by the USDA National Agriculture Library and The Ohio State University Library, OARDC. It is an excellent diversified source of information. www.osu.campusguides.com/agnic_bees_pollination

More information on other topics is available from other AgNic sources. See the AgNic home page for a list of the partners and the information they provide. www.agnic.org/

- The sound of a humming beehive. www.animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/bugs/honeybee/

- Various videos on timely subjects from the University of Florida. www.extension.org/pages/25099/university-of-florida-bee-disease-videos


A somber and threatening presentation professionally produced.
Recent Alabama Honey Production Statistics

Honey production in 2008 totaled 594,000 pounds. There were about 13,500 colonies in Alabama of which 9,000 were surplus honey-producing colonies. Yield per colony averaged 66 pounds, up 10 pounds from 2007. The average price per pound was $1.86, up 37¢ from a year ago. Total honey production in the United States was 160,861,000 pounds. The Alabama crop represented 0.4% of the U.S. crop. The value of honey bee pollination is not reflected in these honey production data from Alabama, nor is the intrinsic value and wholesomeness of locally produced honey reflected in these data. Individual county data on honey production is also presented at www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/Alabama/Publications/Annual_Statistical_Bulletin/2009/2009AlabamaAgricultureStatistics.pdf.

European Hornets (Vespa crabo L.) in Alabama — and many other states

A few Alabama beekeepers have asked about potential danger to both themselves and to their bees posed by a large true hornet — the European hornet — sometimes called the giant hornet. I guess the news is mixed. They can sting and the sting is painful and if they choose, they can eat some of your honey bees. The good news is that they do not generally do this entire scene could easily be contained in a tablespoon, but the detail and painting are remarkable. The order numbers are “Beekeepers” HO Scale A1897. It is sold by Woodland Scenics, P.O. Box 98, Linn Creek, MO 65052, www.woodlandscenics.com.

A search on the web reveals an erratic supply and selling price range of $10.50 to $13.00. In most cases, shipping is about $3.00 more.

New to beekeeping?

If you already have hives of bees, consider the following routine seasonal preparations for winter.

- Position food stores (probably in two deep hive bodies), so they are just above the brood nest.
- Fall feeding might help some, but if the colony needs feeding, a mild winter will be necessary to help keep them alive. This will be easier for those who are keeping bees from Montgomery and south.
- Install mouse guards or entrance reducers. Mice cause havoc in a wintering colony.
- Provide an upper entrance. In some states, this is necessary for bees to avoid snow and ice, but in most of Alabama, an upper entrance allows moisture-filled air to escape the hive.
- If you use an inner cover that has a deep and shallow side, place the deep side toward the bees. This gives the bees additional space to cluster above the frame top bars. Reverse the inner cover early next spring before the nectar flow begins.
- Packing and insulation procedures are frequently discussed in beekeeping publications. Up to this point and due to the Alabama climate, “packing” wintering colonies is not necessary.

AUGUST 2011 REVIEW

This past summer, honey bees robbing neighboring colonies were a major issue in Alabama. Because of the severe drought, bees have been preying on each other. Beekeepers have been hesitant to take honey off colonies because of the robbing threat. Bees have consumed considerable stores during the dearth period of late July and early August. Beekeepers still have honey to remove, however, and much of that came off in September. Bees have been working cotton and soybean in cropland areas. Other nectar sources have included early goldenrod and Kudzu. (www.ams.usda.gov/mnreports/fvmhoney.pdf)
either. Their stinging mechanism is
designed primarily for paralyzing other
insects, which are part of their food
sources. Their typical diet includes
grasshoppers, flies, caterpillars,
crickets, and yellowjackets. No doubt,
they occasionally take honey bees as
food, but they do not appear to be a
serious pest. However, a few of you
have felt that they were taking more
of your bees than you liked. If you
threaten their nest or disturb their
surroundings, you may have to deal
with a large, stinging hornet.

Figure 2. European hornet and honey bee gathering
spilled honey. (B. Pierson photo)

They are normally forest dwellers
and stay to themselves. Their colonies
usually reach a population of about
300 to 400 but rarely more than
1,000. While they are related to the
feared Asian hornets (Vespa velutina
nigrithorax), they are not the same.
British beekeepers are preparing for
the arrival of the Asian hornet, which
has already colonized both France
and Spain. Though some of you may not
want the hornet around, we are lucky
to only have the European hornet in
the United States. Its geographical
range extends from the northeastern
states west to the Dakotas and south to
Louisiana and Florida. The hornet was
introduced into New York in the 1840s
and has spread slowly ever since.

Ironically, the biggest issue is that
they girdle tree and shrub stems to
gather needed nest-building materials
and food from the oozing sap. These
insects frequently fly at night.

Because they have been here for
170 years without being major pests of
honey bees, I suggest that they be left
alone. If that is not possible and even
though you are a beekeeper with all

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the necessary gear, you still may want
to call a professional exterminator.
Don’t plug the entrance. That will
force them to develop other entrances.

For more references, see
• www.ento.psu.edu/extension/
factsheets/european-hornet
• www.bing.com/images/search?q=Eu
ropean+hornet&qvrt=European+
hornet&FORM=IGRE

NASS REDUCES AGRICULTURAL ESTIMATION PROGRAMS

In light of funding reductions in fiscal year (FY) 2011 and the likelihood of additional reductions in FY 2012, NASS conducted deliberate reviews of all programs against mission- and user-based criteria, aimed at finding cost savings and forward-thinking business efficiencies so that key timely, accurate and useful data remains available in service to agriculture. As a result, the agency is discontinuing or reducing a wide range of agricultural survey programs. The decision to eliminate or reduce these reports was not made lightly, but it was nevertheless necessary, given the funding situation. Because of the timing of the agency’s survey work during the coming year, these decisions are necessary now.

These programs are as follows:
• Annual Reports on Farm Numbers, Land in Farms and Livestock Operations - Eliminate
• Catfish and Trout Reports  - Eliminate all
• Annual Floriculture Report - Eliminate
• January Sheep and Goat Report  - Eliminate
• Chemical Use Reports  - Reduce frequency of commodity coverage
• July Cattle Report - Eliminate
• Distiller Co-Products for Feed Survey - Cancel
• Annual Bee and Honey Report  - Eliminate
• Annual Hops Production Report  - Eliminate
• Monthly Potato Stocks Report  - Reduce from monthly to quarterly
• Annual Mink Report - Eliminate
• Fruit and Vegetable in-season forecast and estimates  - Reduce from monthly and quarterly to annual report
• Nursery Report - Eliminate
• Rice Stocks June and September reports  - Eliminate but continue January, March and August reports

Recognizing the importance of NASS’s data products and services to U.S. agriculture, NASS will make available similar data either less frequently or within the every 5-year Census of Agriculture. The next census will be conducted beginning January 2013 to reflect activities in the 2012 calendar year.

For more information, contact the Agricultural Statistics Board of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), Sue DuPont (202) 690-8122.

(Information taken from Catch the Buzz, October 17, 2011.)

USDA Eliminates Annual Honey Report

Many of you have never had need
to refer to the National Agricultural
Statistics Service (NASS), but you
have seen their information
somewhere and did not know it.
For instance, the Alabama honey
production data presented in the
section above was straight from the
NASS system. This statistical service
will be missed in the U.S. beekeeping
industry. The announcement is
presented below:

Update
December 9
USDA NASS Annual Bee
and Honey Report
has been reinstated –
for full report, see
http://www.nass.usda.gov/
Newsroom/Notices/12_09_2011.asp
Ozone Might Help Make Bee Hives Cleaner and Safer

In 2008, the USDA, ARS in Logan, UT, researchers reported that ozone might be useful in making the standard beehive cleaner and safer for honey bees. Rosalind R. James is the lead investigator.

James tested ozone's effects on two pesticides, coumaphos and tau-fluvalinate, both widely used by beekeepers to control varroa mites, a major enemy of bees. Studies elsewhere indicate that residues of these chemicals can accumulate in hives, including in the honeycomb. Beekeepers typically reuse the honeycomb after the honey has been extracted.

James was able to show that ozone at specific rates, temperature, and time degraded the two pesticides. As many as 20 hours were needed to break down tau-fluvalinate.

James also looked at ozone's ability to destroy all stages of the greater wax moth. Young wax moth larvae and adults were killed by just a few hours of ozone exposure. However, eggs, the most resistant life stage, had to be exposed to the gas for a few days.

Further tests are needed to find out whether the breakdown products of the degraded pesticides pose a hazard to bees, James noted.

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If all bees did disappear, humankind would be in very serious trouble on several fronts.

For more information and references on this subject see www.snopes.com/quotes/einstein/bees.asp.