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Bee Health is Focus of New National Web Resource

A new Web resource can help the beekeeping industry with new research as well as an amalgamation of science-based information.

Released July 21, 2009

Researchers and educators from America's land-grant universities, government agencies and industry have banded together to provide a comprehensive resource for science-based information on bee health management strategies. It's on eXtension, (pronounced E-extension), <http://www.extension.org>.

Pollinating bees are essential members of American agro-ecosystems. The high death rates of bee colonies and the emergence of Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) concern many fruit and vegetable producers from home gardeners to commercial growers.

"In these challenging times for the beekeeping industry, with several factors contributing to reductions in pollination, a large cooperative effort is needed among researchers, extension personnel, beekeepers, crop producers and associated industry people to provide answers and solutions that benefit everyone," said John Skinner, professor at the University of Tennessee and leader of the new eXtension resource that amassed the latest research information about health of all species of bees.

Keith Delaplane, professor at the University of Georgia, explained, "The eXtension concept is a direct response to concerns about information quality on the Internet. Users can access eXtension with the same confidence they access their own state university extension networks. Information published on the bee health Web site represents the best summary opinions of scientific authorities across America. One of the exciting things about working with eXtension is that it represents a practical forum for bee scientists as well as beekeepers."

The bee health site provides help for new and inexperienced producers, as well as those with experience but who need an answer to a specific question. The site includes answers to frequently asked questions (FAQs). If a question cannot be found in the FAQs, eXtension's "Ask an Expert" feature can be used for a quick response. The site also includes in-depth, peer-reviewed articles covering bee biology and production.

Pollinator losses

In "A Survey of Honey Bee Colonies Losses in the U.S. Between September 2008 and April 2009," the Apiary Inspectors of America and researchers at the USDA-Agricultural Research Service Beltsville Honey Bee Lab found that colony losses are still high in the majority of operations surveyed. Overall the colony losses were 28.6 percent. This is down from the previous winters of 2007/2008 and 2006/2007 when colony losses were recorded at 35.8 and 31.8 percent respectively. Only 15 percent of colonies died with CCD symptoms this year compared to 60 percent the previous year.

In the 2006 release of the National Research Council report, "Status of Pollinators in North America," many bees other than the honey bee (non-apids) are recognized as important pollinators of crop and non-crop plants. The report identified the need for improved management and disease control of non-apids, such as bumble bees and alfalfa leaf cutting bees, as well as conservation strategies in the field.

These losses underline the need to get the most up to date and accurate information to beekeepers as quickly as possible to improve bee health and continue to improve survival. Bee declines are likely a product of negatively interacting factors in pathology, immunology, nutrition, toxicology, genetics, ecosystems management and bee husbandry.

"Declining honey bee health is complex and the answers that are needed to improve colony survival will only come from a concerted effort by a diverse group of scientists, beekeepers, extension specialists and other interested parties working closely together to improve honey bee health," said Jeff Pettis, research leader at the USDA-ARS Bee Research Laboratory.

Contributors

Experienced researchers and extension personnel in the United States contributed to the new site. The bee health group decided to begin with a concentration in bee biology as a prerequisite for other topics. Their next focus will be on best management practices, disease and pest information and bee breeding. The experts are based in 1862 and 1890 land-grant universities, other universities, education centers and the USDA-ARS.

24 eXtension resource areas

Bee health is one of many Web communities within eXtension, www.extension.org, a national project of the U.S. Cooperative Extension System. Other topic resources include information on the financial crisis; animal manure management; beef cattle; corn and soybean production; cotton production; dairy cattle; disasters; diversity across higher education; entrepreneurs and their communities; families food and fitness; family caregiving; geospatial technology; goats; horses; horticulture; imported fire ants; niche meat processing; organic agriculture; parenting; personal finance; pest management; science, engineering and technology for youth; and wildlife damage management.

eXtension is an educational partnership of more than 70 land-grant universities helping Americans improve their lives with access to timely, objective, research-based information and educational opportunities. eXtension's interactive Web site is customized with links to local Cooperative Extension sites. Land-grant universities were founded on the ideals that higher education should be accessible to all, that universities should teach liberal and practical subjects and share knowledge with people throughout their states.

~30~

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SARE Grant colony update 7/27/09

By Erin MacGregor-Forbes

First I need to start with a little background. For anyone who hasn't received the last couple of Bee Lines, I applied for and got a SARE farmer grant to look at/demonstrate the differences between colonies started from Southern Packages and colonies started with Northern raised nucs, with a third group of colonies started with packages but then re-queened in June with northern queens. The project started in April with the arrival of the packages. Nucs came May 1 and re-queening happened June 17th.

I am not prepared to talk about results yet as everything is way up in the air (particularly with this incredibly awful weather we've been having – I'm trying to stay cool about that) suffice to say it has been a terrible summer for honeybees.

Tony Jadcak, our Maine State Apiarist came and inspected all of the SARE colonies last Tuesday. That week fit with all of our schedules and Tuesday looked as good as any other day. Tony inspected my yard in Biddeford first and then headed over to Standish to Larry's. The day was overcast and the bees weren't really flying – by the end of our 10 colonies it was showering. The inspection at Larry's SARE yard happened in a fairly steady light rain. Ugh.

Two of my colonies have been disqualified from the grant as they have "gone laying worker" and there is no solution to that which fits into the Grant parameters. I have moved both to my outyard in Falmouth and combined them with nucs – they have stabilized nicely and are doing fine. The attached photo of the laying worker eggs were taken by Jack Hildreth, president of the CCBA and my #1 helper in the bee yard.



So the Biddeford inspection: Tony and I ran through all of the colonies together. I “drove” the first one before he finally shoved me aside and started running the inspections himself. Tony is a lot rougher with the bees than I am, he’s also a lot faster – and if you have lots of hives to go through, that’s important. I did leave the yard thinking my little gentle kittens would have a different impression of human beings after the run through we’d just done. (heavy sigh – c’est la vie!)

We did drone brood checking and alcohol washes on all of the colonies. We saw signs of Deformed Wing Virus and something else Tony calls “snot brood” which does not have a real name yet but he believes to be viral and related to or vectored by Varroa. I also did a 72 hour natural mite drop count Thursday PM- Sunday PM . The results are in the below graph.

Colony Number	Mite Count - 72 Hours	Average Mite Fall/day	Drone Brood check (20 Cells)	Drone Brood Check %	alcohol wash mites/bees	% adult infestation per Alcohol Wash
13	Disqualified					
14	79	26	3/20	15%	10/103	9.7%
15	208	69	2/20	10%	11/108	10.2%
16	90	30	2/20	10%	26/121	21.5%
17	64	21	2/20	10%	1/149	0.7%
18	15	5	0/20	0%	6/86	7.0%
19	70	23	no drone	No data	23/124	18.5%
20	39	13	2/20	10%	7/165	4.2%
21	116	39	1/20	5%	1/95	1.1%
22	95	32	1/20	5%	16/105	15.2%
23	121	40	2/20	10%	18/135	13.3%
24	Disqualified					

I consider the Alcohol Wash Percentage to be the best gauge for mite levels in the hive as it is an actual representative sampling of bees from the brood area of the hive.

I don’t like killing bees to monitor mite loads, but I feel like it is really important to get good data about mite levels. As you can see from the natural mite fall and the drone checks, those are less precise and less accurate than an alcohol wash sample.

I hope you are monitoring your hives’ mite loads, or at least planning your mite control strategy. Now is the time to order your treatments, whichever you choose. I personally use ApilifeVar in my own apiaries and we are planning to use it for the grant colonies as well.

Goldenrod is just starting to bloom in the SARE yard as of the last couple of days. I hope the fall flow is strong and allows our bees to fully prepare for winter. This has been a very hard summer for bees so far, I am hoping for a much more forgiving late summer/Fall and that the bees will build up well for winter.

I do have three SARE colonies with three supers on! I also have two colonies with no supers yet (#18 and #16). I caught a swarm from #24 in the swarm trap I placed at the yard (see photos in the trap article on page 5) and that’s what I combined the hive with after disqualification and moving out of the SARE yard. Larry and I are having a lot of fun and learning a ton!

We’ll keep you posted...

-Erin



Swarm Trap in the SARE Yard

By Erin MacGregor-Forbes, Master Beekeeper

My half of the SARE grant colonies are kept in an apiary at my workplace, Sterling Rope Company in Biddeford. We are located in the Biddeford Industrial Park on Morin Street. These are not my first colonies here at work. Prior to the SARE grant, I'd kept 5 of my own hives here. I like having the bees at work because it gives me a chance to "peek in" on what is going on during the work day. I often take my lunch break with the bees. In the winter, I can take a look at the colonies and see if they are getting out to fly on a warm day.

At first my co-workers were a little nervous about the bees. I'd try to get them to come look at the colonies and they'd have nothing to do with it. Over time they've become much more comfortable with the bees. I guess I hadn't realized quite how much.

I put a swarm trap in a mid sized maple tree right outside the front door of Sterling. The placement was specific so I could see if there were bees "scouting" from the window of my office. I used a plant pot style home made swarm trap (in the style of the CCBA swarm workshop this spring.) I figured if I saw scouting, I'd know that there was a swarm out in the yard and would hopefully be able to retrieve it in the cluster stage.

On Thursday, June 25, 2009 I took the day off to teach the CCBA overwintering nucs workshop. I also had scheduled the following day off as a "rain date." The weather had been terrible for about the previous 10 days but luckily the sun came out for our workshop and for Friday and Saturday too. The workshop went great and I used the time on Friday to catch up with my colonies and help a friend with his as well. Friday afternoon I received a call from the owner of Sterling on my cell phone.

"I just wanted to tell you that there are bees in your basket" Carolyn said.

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“In the basket?” I asked, “you mean a few bees flying around and looking at it?”

“No, in the basket. Lots of them. The sales guys saw them come in just before lunch. They said there were millions of them.” She replied.

“That’s great” I said. “I’ll be down to grab them in an hour or so.” I grabbed a hive body and some frames and headed down to the office.

When I got to Sterling it was about 5:15 on Friday so most everyone was on their way home. I asked our sales team “why didn’t you call me?” – They said they just assumed the bees were doing what they were supposed to be doing – my bees going into my trap. (That’s what I get for open feeding pollen on the picnic bench in the spring—they’re all desensitized to the bees.) “Next time” I suggested “call me if you see that many bees all together, ok?” They assured me they would. “It was pretty cool” I was told “for a little while, there were just so many bees all over the place – and then they all went in.”

I set up my equipment and settled the bees in. While the flying bees worked their way into the hive I checked through the SARE colonies, sure enough #24 had clearly swarmed. More on that later, here are a couple of pictures of the swarm transfer.



Swarm Trap in the tree +- 6' off the ground



Cluster on top of swarm trap many more bees were on the trap walls



Bees settling in to the new hive—one frame of drawn comb + 9 frames of Duragilt Foundation



Happy Beekeeper ready to go home for the evening!

Pollination

by Larry Peiffer

Foraging is the most important task in the lifetime of the honey bee. As the bee matures, it's duties and responsibilities to the hive change. The foraging is done by the mature bees of more than 3 weeks old. The bees foraging activities such as water gatherers, collecting resin for propolis, nectar and pollen are essential for the survival of the hive.

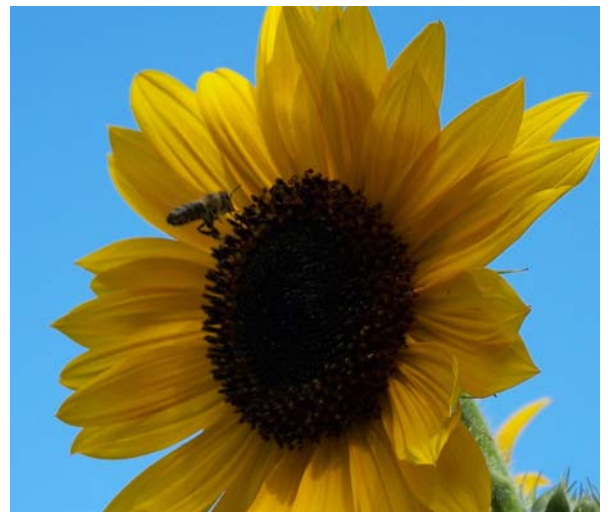
Of these, pollination perhaps arguably, is the most important. Not just it's importance to the hive, but the benefits it gives the rest of the world. You've perhaps heard some of the trivia, such as a honey bee might make 10 to a 100 trips a day, visiting as many as a thousand blooms per trip. Or a single bee might visit a million blooms in a lifetime. The honey bees internal pheromone systems dictate what the bees jobs will be. This would account for more than 30% of the bees in the hive, as foragers. The bees that forage will continue this work, until their demise, generally from wearing out a wing, loosing a wing or caught in bad weather.

The pollinating bee is directed by other bees, called scout bees, or by other foraging bees that have located on their own, a quality source of pollen. The bees communicate their source by doing the round, wagtail or sickle dance which directs distance (but not elevation) and angle from the hive to the food source. The bees have 5 eyes. Two are compound, similar to that of a house fly. In the color spectrum the bees see most colors, but see Yellow, Blue, Violate and White particularly well and don't see red at all. The other three eye's are in a triangle format and are between the compound eyes used for navigation and see ultra-violet. The bees also have special body hairs called mechanoreceptors, that help them adjust for wind-speed, wind direction and better help in gauging distance. The bees flight directions are accurate within a couple feet. The dancing bee also communicates to fellow bees with taste and smell. The bees can taste with their mouth, antennae and feet. So as the bees follow their directions to the location, they can fine tune the location with sent and taste. Once they have been to the area, they can then recall what the blooms look like, as they will look much like a bulls-eye with the bees vision.

The honey bee is well constructed to hold nearly her own weight in pollen. She's able to pack pollen into a series of plumage type hairs that make a basket-like receptacle on her rear legs. Because she is hairy, she is often seen with pollen on her head and other body parts as well. There are some restrictions as to what flowers bees can and can not pollinate. The flowers are generally made so as to give the bee a reward of sorts, as it makes it's visit. Whether it be nectar or pollen, the bees can take something back to the hive. Some restrictions are made on the bees as their tongue isn't long enough to reach the nectar source in some varieties of flowers, such as red clover. Some plants nectar is a bit acidic, such as tomatoes and the bees prefer something else. Some plants are created so the pollen isn't easily moved or the bee cant get to it. So "buzz pollination" is required and honey bees aren't known for this, bumble bees are.

Now, I as well as many other interested and curious beekeepers, we are involved in the planting of perennials that are on the list of flowers the bees like to visit. The thing is, unless there are mass quantities of these blooms, they will only be attended by a very few bees. The bees look for concentrated sources so they become efficient in the gathering process. When a honey bee goes out to forage, it only will collect from a single species; blueberries, dandelions, apples, or clover as examples. Thus, the pollen brought back to the hive by a single bee is from a single plant species. The bees will pollinate different varieties of a plant species, thus you get cross pollination. When a bee becomes a forager, they continue with foraging that plant species until it no longer exists. This makes them experienced and very efficient at gathering from the given plant. Then they will take new directions from a bee that's dancing or perhaps stumble onto a new source themselves.

It's hard to imagine what our grocery stores might look like with 30% to 40% fewer food supplies in them, without honey bees. It's difficult to imagine how the human race might survive without honey bees. Albert Einstein came to the conclusion and once said, "If the honey bees ever become extinct, within four years, so will the human race". With that said, I think Pollination is perhaps more important, then the collection of surplus honey.



Favorite Beekeeping Items

Of the Maine Master Beekeepers

One of my favorite beekeeping items is an old chest freezer that was given to me. It isn't pretty, but it does work and I have found it to be very useful. Drawn comb is very valuable (just ask a new beekeeper who needs it, but doesn't have any!) so I do all I can to keep it from being damaged in storage.

Extracted supers that are not going back on the hives immediately are placed in the freezer for 48 hours to kill any wax moth eggs and larvae. Once they are removed and come to room temperature they can be put back on the hives over the inner covers for the bees to clean out.

Cut comb honey is stored in the freezer until used.

Extra drawn frames or frames with honey are stored in the freezer until needed for supplemental feeding, to start packages or nucs, etc.

Storage in the freezer protects against damage from mice as well as wax moths and no chemicals (such as Para-Moth) are needed.—**Carol Cottrill**

I am definately impressed with my hive carrier. There is no easy way to move a hive from one place to another without this great tool. A bit pricy but anyone that has lifted a couple hives into the back of a truck to move them will appreciate how easily the hive carrier makes the job. I would never give up my smoker or hive tool but I put the carrier right up there with them. **-Rick Cooper**

For Apiculture: My smoker is a German pipe held in my mouth while I tend the bees or which stays at its place in the specially designed veil. I see two major advantages over the conventional smoker: 1) it allows for the use of much less smoke, by blowing just the necessary amount at the relevant place, and 2) my hands are free to do business. A pipe fully loaded is enough for the examination of more than 10 hives.

For Apitherapy: I made a device that I use to collect bees, some 20 to 50 bees as needed, by sucking them at the entrance of the hive or from the ventilation hole in a super into a small jar which I then cover with a perforated lid (for bee venom therapy). This can be used any time of the year.—**Theo Cherbuliez**

My favorite beekeeping item (aside from my usual tools) is a European Scythe. Beekeepers are old-timey tool lovers for the most part and when I first started cleaning up around hives I was looking for an alternative to a string trimmer. I found a company here in Perry, Maine that sells European Scythes and bought one. (www.scythesupply.com) Now we have 4 in my family, two fitted to me and two fitted to my husband Scott. I use my scythes to clear grass and weeds around the hives in my outyards and at home — no gas, no noise, no stinging! Yay! A nice sharp scythe can handle small brush and large weeds as well as grass and wildflowers. And scything is a fun and relaxing way to spend a little time outdoors. **-Erin Forbes**



David Merrill of Falmouth clearing grass around nucs with his well used scythe

BEE SCHOLS—SIGN UP EARLY!

APIARY MANAGEMENT CLASS!

CUMBERLAND COUNTY COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

The Cumberland County cooperative extension will be hosting an **intermediate level bee school** this winter, instructor will be Erin MacGregor-Forbes. Focus of this school will be continuing education for beekeepers who have at least one season of experience. This will be a Five Week Bee School. Wednesday nights, January 20—February 26. (including snow date) Location will be USM Portland Campus. Please contact the Cumberland County Cooperative Extension for details. 780-4205 or cecmb@umext@maine.edu

York County Beginning Bee School in the FALL!!!!

The York County Cooperative Extension will be offering TWO Beginner Bee Schools this year. The first Bee School will be held Wednesday nights, October 21—November 18, 2009. 6:00pm—8:30pm. The second Bee School will be held in February—March, 2010, dates to be determined. Please contact the York County Cooperative Extension for more details. 324-2814 or ceyrk@umext.maine.edu

Alternative Beekeeping Workshop

Erin Forbes, one of four EAS Master Beekeepers in Maine, will present a workshop from 6-8:30 p.m. Sept. 16 at the Damariscotta River Association's conference room. Erin will speak about reducing and eliminating the use of chemicals in hive management, understanding bee behaviors, as well as other beekeeping topics. This workshop is excellent for both beginner and experienced beekeepers, or those thinking about entering beekeeping. Traditional beekeeping methods, as a result of increased bee diseases, rely heavily on regular application of chemicals to the hive. Only recently have beekeepers been finding ways to manage hives without chemicals. Erin's web site is www.overlandhoney.com Erin is also coordinating a SARE project for Maine. Cost of the workshop is \$25 a person, or \$40 per couple. PRE-REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED. Please mail check to Leann Diehl, 22 Allen Lane, Washington, ME 04574. Space is limited. FMI: email Leann at loonerone@gmail.com. Or call 845-2704.

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From the Editor:

The time has come for me to move on and pass along the responsibility of editing the Bee Line to another member of our organization. I'm refocusing on teaching bee schools and workshops.

I've got to say that I have sincerely enjoyed acting as editor. I've met a lot of great people, and I appreciate all the feedback regarding my work on the BeeLine.

You'll still be hearing from me regularly, I'll be updating on the SARE Grant progress and also contributing beekeeping articles whenever I can.

I am sure that along with the new editor the BeeLine will get some new energy and enthusiasm. Please remember to support your BeeLine by contributing articles, "Buzzings" and photos.

Thanks and best to you all,
-Erin Forbes

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Buzzings

All MSBA members are invited to submit announcements and news for this newsletter at least two weeks before publication date. THE BEE LINE is usually mailed on: February 1, April 1, June 1, August 1, October 1, and December 1.

CLUB ACTIVITIES

Western Maine Beekeeper's Association

Open Hive – August 15, 2009 10 am: Charlie Merrill's, 57 Cozy Cove Road, Livermore (897-6128)

Directions: From Farmington or Route 2 take Route 4 turning right at the traffic lights in Livermore Falls and then go south 3 miles, across the bridge and turn right on Hathaway Hill Rd. Go 0.1 mile and cross Crash Rd, continue 0.25 mile and turn left on Cozy Cove Rd. Third house on the right – brown gambrel.

From route 108 take Route 4 5.3 miles north and turn left on Crash Rd (by the Livermore Town Office). Go 0.1 mile to Hathaway Hill Rd and follow directions above.

Western Maine Beekeepers Association will have slide show and presentation by Tony Jadczak on **getting ready for winter** on Wednesday, September 2, 2009, at Region 9 School, Route 2, Mexico cafeteria 6:00 - 9 pm. All area beekeepers are invited to attend. Call Carol Cottrill (364-0917) for more information.

Event: Knox Lincoln County Beekeepers Fall Management Workshop

Date: Saturday, August 29 (rain date Sunday, August 30)

Time: 11:30 a.m.

Hosts: Trisha Badger & Kevin Carney, Whitefoot Farm 484 East Pond Road, Jefferson 701-1069 or 832-7922

CHECK THE MSBA WEBSITE www.mainebeekeepers.org FOR CURRENT INFORMATION ON CLUB ACTIVITIES!!!!!!

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The Bee Line requests and welcomes your contributions!

Please contact the Editor:
with your comments,
photos and contributions :

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THE BACKYARD BEEKEEPER

Why Are You Here?

By Master Beekeeper Carol Cottrill

New beekeepers in our classes always ask how often they should check their hives. The standard answer seems to be “every week to ten days”. Off they go and follow the calendar dutifully opening their hives, removing each frame and looking it over. They may not really know exactly what they are looking for, but they are following the schedule. Experience has shown that opening a hive and messing around with it will set the hive back, but new beekeepers need to learn by practice and observation. Opening a hive to see it changing and developing over the seasons is an important part of learning the art of beekeeping.

Once the newness of this process has worn off, however, it is time to adjust hive inspections so that the bees are not disrupted unnecessarily. It is also time to become more organized so that trips to the bee yard are more efficient. Opening a hive and finding that it needs a super when all the supers are in storage back at your house means the hive will be disturbed a second time once you retrieve a super.

Keeping a simple notebook to diary your hive observations can be very helpful in organizing your bee yard visits. Bringing paper and pencil with you can result in a sticky mess; if you only have a few hives recording brief notes after leaving the bee yard may be fine. If you have a failing memory such as mine you may want to bring a recipe card (better than a piece of flimsy paper) and make a few quick notes with a pencil (not a pen – ink runs) that can be transferred to your diary. I find I often refer to my notes to check year to year progress, determine approximately when I performed various tasks and see what things worked and what didn't.

Another useful reminder can be as simple as a brick on the hive. I use rocks to weight down the hive covers, but keep several bricks on the ground near the hives. If there is a reason a hive needs special attention it gets a brick on top when I close it up. Maybe it has swarmed and I need to check to see if the new queen has mated and is laying a good pattern. Perhaps I am keeping an eye on mite levels in case I need to treat the hive earlier than normal. Even without my diary in hand I know which hives might need an extra inspection.

Use your diary to plan your trips to the bee yard. If you know why you are opening your hives you are more apt to have all the supplies and equipment you need. You don't need a fancy container to keep all your equipment in, but you

should have something that holds all you need. Toolboxes, buckets, totes of all sort will work as long as it is something that you can add to as you figure out what is essential each time you inspect your hives. Is there room for a container to collect hive scrapings so you won't leave them lying around the bee yard (a coffee can perhaps). Are you putting on medications that require use of chemical resistant gloves and eye protection.

If your bees need to ask “Why are you here?” perhaps it time for you to become better organized before going to visit them!



Laying worker eggs in SARE #24

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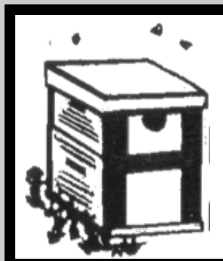
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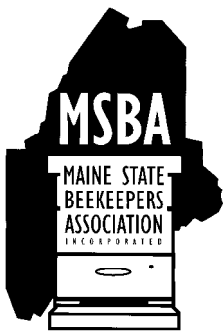
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