

FNE03-490

Interim Report

#1) Performance Evaluation of Different Strains of Honeybees in the Northeast

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#2) The major goal of this project is to try and identify specific strain of honeybees- which are commercially available to beekeepers- and will perform optimally in the Northeast. The crucial benchmark being survival, i.e. over wintering. There are obviously, numerous factors, many of which are inter-related that ultimately affect a colony of bees ability to survive. I will be looking at some of these influences on a limited basis (pest and disease presence); however, due to the limited scope of this project, mortality will be a key factor.

#3) My farming status has remained basically the same, i.e., part-time production of small acreage of vine crops, honey production and pollination services. I experienced a greater demand for mid-summer pollination requests than I could meet this year, despite operating more hives, honey demands are also out pacing production at this point, although market prices are certainly a factor to consider. I am hoping to produce some baled straw in 2004 off some land I seeded to rye this fall, in addition to the above.

#4) My three collaborators are intended to aid in analysis and dissemination of the results and findings in this project.

-New England Small Farm Institute: work shop and information clearing house

-Bee Culture Magazine: publish findings to a large focused audience

-USDA Beltsville bee laboratory: aid in disease and pest loads

#5) Most of the work on this project has basically been done, now we have to wait for time to pass and the findings to show themselves.

This spring 20 hives of bees were established in new equipment, utilizing package bees from Georgia, and introducing multiples of five different strains of queens, which were procured from different queen breeders around the country. Most of this went according to plan with the exception of one set of queens arriving late from one of the breeders. I did experience some poor results from these late arrivals because the timing was thrown off and an unforeseen delay and set back occurred in these hives. The hives expanded, were added to, and monitored over the course of the season. Build up was rather slow and lengthy mainly due to the fact that the bees had to draw out all new comb, because of the new equipment and the weather was fickle quite a bit. Two hives required additional honey supers. Ultimately, 17 hives went into the winter, the losses occurred from some of the late arriving queens, who had difficulty being accepted and/or failed to thrive due to the lateness and timing issues. The remainder were prepared for winter and no chemical treatments were used at all.

#6) The results so far look good, but a lot remains to be seen!!

#7) The weather was a little crazy, but what year isn't. The good thing was that all the hives were located in the same bee yard so they all experienced similar conditions. The winter is getting off to a pretty vicious start.

#8) The economic impact remains to be seen. Winter survival is a key economic factor and subsequent production patterns will need to be looked at.

#9) I'm hopeful this project will provide some results, which will point in a direction for further investigation. It is too early to tell, but hopefully some strains will perform better than others.

Through the first stage of the project, I can not say anything truly striking showed itself, but wintering and the following season will provide for much anticipated progress. This will hopefully lead to the identification of some strain or strains which should be investigated further.

#10) This is a learning process, not just for me, but for beekeeping on the whole. Many people are trying different things, I feel it is important to go about it in way where positive outcomes can be noted and followed upon. The right or a better bee for the Northeast could have a big impact on the profitability and sustainability of beekeeping in this region.

#11) The outreach portion of this project has yet to take place, I still need to wait until spring to see the outcome of the over wintering and monitor the production season for further results. Then the outreach segment will take place.

#12) M. Spensley Rickert 1/14/04
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