



Project Update, July 2013: Feeding All Summer

A Comparison of Strength and Survivability of Honey Bee Colonies with Conventional Versus Northern-Requeened Packages

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SARE FNE 12-756

Every year is different. Every season is also different. Beekeepers need to plan for each of the possible scenarios that may materialize, yet only one does. You can fight the weather, the bees, and the season, or you can roll with it. Or you can fail to recognize what is happening around you and just bull on with the plan you made last February. But usually that doesn't work out best for the bees.

The 2013 package season was late and difficult. Rain and cold in the South had even the most experienced package producers scrambling to fulfill their orders. Package shipments were delayed, mating nucs were stalled out, deliveries were late and beekeepers were nervous. The SARE packages were delayed twice, with the actual package pickup

being May 10th. Finally we had our bees installed and we began feeding 1:1 sugar water in pail feeders above the inner cover.

Since installation, the weather in our area (Jefferson, Maine—Midcoast/Augusta area) has been less than ideal. We had not as much sun as we'd like in the early part of the season, rain through the main nectar flow, and now sun during the slow time that we here in Maine consider to be a dearth period. And so we are continuing to feed our bees in these newly started colonies.

As of this writing on August 6th, we have only stopped feeding 2 of the 50 colonies.

Our grant specifies feeding each colony until they have 4 8-frame medium boxes substantially drawn out. At this point our colony configurations look like this:

Stats as of August 6, 2013	
Colony Size	Number of Colonies
2 Boxes	18
3 Boxes	24
4 Boxes	6
5 Boxes	1
Disqualified	1
Total	50

Our one disqualified colony has become hopelessly queenless; it was one of the colonies that we were attempting to requeen, and the bees killed not just our first attempt at requeening, but also two additional caged northern queens that we attempted to introduce. At the point they were hopelessly broodless and queenless and beginning to develop laying workers, we removed them from the project. Outside of the confines of the SARE project, we have combined them with a strong queenright colony and let them settle in for late summer and fall.

Outside the disqualified one, the other colony we are not feeding is the one that currently has 5 boxes on, meaning that the fourth box is substantially drawn out.

The remaining colonies are all still using the sugar syrup we are feeding them to create

wax and build comb, and they are progressing nicely for this time of year. Overall they are not as strong as in prior years at this point, and we are attributing that to weather. In the previous years we had stopped feeding the last colonies in late July; this year it looks like we may be feeding





some right through until fall. But they need it, and that's the way this season is rolling. Some years newly started colonies need more beekeeper assistance than others.

Feeding at this rate is also consuming massive amounts of time and sugar. Each feeding takes about 9 hours, including collecting the pails from the hive, washing them to remove mold, making syrup, pouring it out, and then taking the pails back out and replacing them on the hives. By my rough calculations, we have gone through about 2640 lbs of sugar since the beginning of the project, averaging out to 52.8 lbs per colony. That sounds like a lot, particularly for the weaker ones, but this is an average. We have been feeding weekly, or more often, for the past 10 weeks.

We've had a number of visitors and helpers

in the SARE yard, including several who have helped us with feeding, and we'd like to thank everyone who has come and helped so far. We greatly enjoy having help — note takers, and just interested company who are engaged in learning more about this project. Visitors to the yard tend to be amazed by the sheer number of colonies in one location and how surprisingly easy it is to be around such a large number of bees in the air. We love the help in feeding,



Thank you — from feeding and note taking to visitors just generally being interested in the work we are doing — you are always appreciated!

note taking, and generally being interested in the work we are doing.

and we love having visitors. It is a great way for people to learn and gain experience, and provides an opportunity for us to practice explaining what we are doing and why. We welcome and appreciate the participation in our project. 🐝



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