

Apiary Inspection Summary for Eastern Pennsylvania

During the summer of 2010 I was apiary inspector in 11 Eastern Pennsylvania counties (Bucks, Carbon, Chester, Delaware, Lehigh, Monroe, Montgomery, Northampton, Philadelphia, Pike and Wayne). Due to the large number of counties covered, the State mandated that priority to given to beekeepers with a previous history of American Foul Brood (AFB), to newly registered beekeepers and to beekeepers that had not been inspected in the last several years. In addition to apiary inspection, the job also entailed sampling for native pollinators and for exotic wood boring beetles. Over the course of the summer, I inspected over 700 colonies. During these inspections I identified 7 colonies with AFB, which was identified primarily by visual observation (punctured cappings, ropy larvae) and a field test (Holst milk test). The AFB infection was confirmed by culturing at the Apiary Lab in Harrisburg. None of these cases of AFB were discovered in the hives of beekeepers that had previous cases of AFB. An important note is that **ALL 7 cases were determined by the lab in Harrisburg to be resistant to TERRAMYCIN (oxytetracycline)**! These 7 cases of AFB were not confined to any one county, but were widely distributed over my territory (please note that I am not at liberty to indicate the exact locations). This suggests that prophylactic treatment with Terramycin in any form (e.g. Terra-Pro Pre Mix, Terra Bee Mix, etc) is probably no longer useful for preventing AFB in our area, and its application in the bee hive is likely playing an important role in maintaining resistance. Thus, I highly recommend against the routine use of Terramycin in bee hives.

Since another priority was to inspect new beekeepers, I was able to observe the level of their skill and knowledge. Although many were doing a good job maintaining their colonies, many others exhibited a profound lack of knowledge of honey bee biology and behavior. One common mistake was a failure to appreciate the concept of BEE SPACE. Some beekeepers had shallow frames in medium or even deep boxes, leading to excessive amounts of honey filled burr comb. Some new beekeepers did not know how to install foundation, resulting in warped comb that the bees joined together. In extreme cases, beekeeper lack of knowledge of and/or respect for bee space led to problems such that some beekeepers no longer had moveable frame hives. With the increased popularity of backyard beekeeping, I think that we experienced beekeepers and our local beekeeping organizations need to increase our educational efforts so that new beekeepers have a successful experience. Perhaps we need to consider mentorship efforts or “beyond beginner” (intermediate?) level classes.

Please note that this report expresses my personal views and is not an official report of the PA Department of Agriculture.

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