



The Bee Box

KAREN RENNICH

Holding yard in CA. Here the colonies are fed heavily as there is no available forage. Photo courtesy of the Bee Informed Partnership



Winter is Coming

This is the time of year when the rubber hits the road for commercial (and all) beekeepers. Everything you have been doing all year to manage your honey bees leads up to this point. Are the bees well fed? Do they have low mite levels? Is the queen healthy and productive? Do they have plenty of winter stores and is the equipment allowing adequate ventilation? Many people don't realize that winter bees differ physiologically from summer bees and have the capability to live for months rather than weeks. They must have the resources to cluster through the winter yet still live long enough to feed the new generation of spring bees once that queen starts laying. In a way, you can think of these winter bees as a special team raised solely for the purpose of keeping the queen alive and converting the winter stores into food to raise their younger sisters. For beekeepers not in the north, there still can be some clustering on colder days and winter stores are still important as there is usually not much as far as nectar or pollen stores out on the landscape.

Out in the Field

Many of our commercial beekeepers' head south to overwinter or go into climate controlled sheds in the north. This allows the bees to grow (in the south) or have a milder winter (in the sheds) before moving into almonds in January.

Our technical transfer teams have been making their last round of colony health assessments in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, North Dakota and Minnesota. As I write this, we still have teams sampling in Texas, California and Florida. It is critical for Varroa mite levels to be low this time of year. If Varroa levels are still elevated, emergency treatments must be applied if those colonies hope to make it through the winter and into almonds. We closely track these mite levels starting in August. We were seeing low mite levels in September but some teams have seen increased mite loads in October compared to last year. We're helping the beekeepers get the colonies as healthy as possible and as prepared as possible for movement into the orchards. The next time we will see them, the almonds will be blooming.

Texas Training

In late October, we had the wonderful opportunity to train new prospective technical transfer teams at the honey bee lab in College Station, Texas. As some of our team members move on to other jobs or academic callings, we had a chance to meet and work with some exciting and talented new team members. Part of the training involved instructing them on how to consistently and accurately evaluate a colony, take a sample, and record the data in sometimes less than ideal circumstances (hot weather, fire ant hills all around the colonies and thigh high grass). It was fun and everyone was excited to participate. We hope they get to meet our beekeepers in the new year and they will certainly will be ready and sampling in almonds.



Ventral view of a Varroa mite. These are the mites responsible for so many honey bee colony deaths. Photo courtesy of the Bee Informed Partnership

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A Time of Thanks and Giving

The Bee Informed Partnership is entering into a time of growth. We are receiving requests from commercial beekeepers to expand the technical transfer teams to other areas of the country. For this, we are grateful. We are excited to continue to serve some beekeepers who have been with us for more than 5 years and we are thrilled to meet new participants. We truly have the best job in the world. As our teams try to service as many beekeepers as possible, additional funds are needed to create new teams, get them on the ground and working with more operations because we know that they have a measurable

impact. For the first time, we are trying our hand at a crowdfunding campaign to raise money in support of the new and current teams. As the holiday season approaches, if you have someone in your family who has everything and cannot think of what to give them, think of us. Your gift to support our teams will also have a measurable impact. Every dollar will go into the support of one of our teams and since we are a nonprofit, your gift is fully tax deductible. Here is the link to donate or share our campaign: <http://igg.me/at/beetechteams>

We all want to make a difference and now you can. Thank you from all of us.



Ben Sallmann (CA tech team) trains new tech team members to assess a colony. Photo courtesy of the Bee Informed Partnership

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