



Fort Bend Buzz

the monthly newsletter of the Fort Bend Beekeepers Association

fostering safe, responsible, successful beekeeping

We are excited to announce that our May 11 meeting will be both in-person and online. In-person will be at Long Acres Ranch, 2335 Richmond Pkwy, Richmond, TX 77469 (not far from the Community Center where we used to meet). It is a fully equipped facility with a great setting for our meetings. ZOOM contact information is the same as before (an email with links will go out soon). Of course there will be conditions due to COVID-19, so see the announcement below for details. We'll be called to order at 7:30 pm after 30 minutes of sorely missed, but socially distanced, social time.

On April 13 Fort Bend County's COVID-19 alert status was reduced to YELLOW or "Low/Moderate Risk" as the number of vaccinations has grown and infections, hospitalizations and deaths continue to show declines. Fort Bend's COVID-19 vaccination count is nearing 200,000 and growing every day! We hope that everyone decides that getting vaccinated is a good idea since the scariest part of this disease is its easy transmission and huge uncertainty of outcome: few symptoms, the ICU or worse. The County also reports that we have had 57,833 cases with 56,227 recoveries. Sadly we have suffered 615 COVID-19 deaths in Fort Bend. "Low/Moderate Risk" allows us to resume careful contact with others as we look forward to being able to resume normal contacts. (Perhaps GREEN is in sight!)

May meeting

The May 11 meeting of the Fort Bend Beekeepers Association will be both online and "in-person" beginning at 7:00 pm. The ZOOM setup instructions remain the same. We plan to be ZOOMing from our in-person meeting at Long Acres Ranch, 2335 Richmond Pkwy, Richmond, TX 77469. The LAR gate will be open until 8 pm. If you arrive after the gate has closed, the keypad code is 2337 (bees). This code will only work during FBBA meetings. We'll be called to order at 7:30 pm after 30 minutes of social time.

There are a number of important requirements due to COVID-19:

- Every person in attendance must complete and turn in a COVID-19 Screening Form. If possible, please bring the completed form with you. Check your email before the meeting for the Screening Form and other important information.
- Masks must be worn while in the Long Acres Ranch (LAR) building. If you don't feel well or have a medical condition that prevents you from wearing a mask, we ask that you please do not attend the meeting.

Don't forget to bring \$5.00 to pay your dues for 2021.

- Maintain 6-foot social distancing, including in the Sign-In and Dues Payment line.

- No refreshments will be provided. Because of the mask requirement, eating in the building will not be permitted and we ask that you please refrain from drinking while in the building as well.

We ask for your patience with these COVID-19 precautions. Like you, our association's leaders look forward to returning to long-winded mask-free conversations. We are grateful for the efforts by AgriLife's Brandy Rader and Boone Holladay in arranging for the Long Acres Ranch meeting. We also thank October Smith, Manager and the LAR staff for accommodating us; we look forward to being a resource and asset to their educational program and mission of promoting the appreciation of nature in Fort Bend County.

Ask a dozen beekeepers...

Here is this month's Q (from one of our members) and an A:

Q: A neighbor called to tell me that there was a swarm in his tree. When I went to check it out, it was the size of a football and I could see comb! It was about 20 ft above the ground so I told him that there was nothing I could do. He wanted to

know who he could call so I told him that I'd get back to him. My wife says that I have way too many bee books, but none of them said anything about open-air colonies. Google couldn't find anything either. Help!

An A: Open-air or "aerial" hives are not all that uncommon so it is a bit surprising that little reference material could be found. Unable to do our usual research, we'll have to settle with what we think we know.

Swarming is the way honey bee colonies "multiply by dividing". About half the bees and the old queen leave the existing colony to set up a new home (a new queen will emerge from her queen cell in the old hive within a day or two).

The old queen is not a strong flyer, so the swarm usually settles somewhere relatively near their old home. They can gather almost anywhere, even on the ground (some call them a "pancake swarms" for obvious reasons). Most often we find swarms clustered in a bush or tree or on a wooden fence or the side of a building. (You should always look around to see if you can determine where a swarm came from since a cutout may be waiting.)

It is the job of scout bees to find a new home for the swarm as the cluster waits to be guided away.

Research has shown that honey bees have a strong preference for cavities about the size of a deep Langstroth box (duh?). Other factors include the nature of the entrance, like obstructions, how high it is above the ground, its size, etc. It is interesting that research shows that the scouts have little concern about proximity to the old hive.

Sometimes the scout bees are unable to find a suitable nest site and the bees begin constructing comb out in the open. It is not unusual to see signs of this when capturing a swarm that has been there for a while. New white wax can be seen affixed to the surface after a swarm has been removed. If need be, the bees continue their work out in the open building comb to raise brood and store pollen, nectar, and honey. Winter survival of open-air hives is low since they don't tend to store much honey and it is quickly consumed trying to stay warm. Last winter's severe cold snap was likely brutal for aerial hives.

April Meeting Notes

After 30 minutes of social time, President Craig Rench opened the online meeting at 7:30 pm and welcomed the 28 members and visitors who had logged in.

Vice-President Danessa Yaschuk made several announcements regarding upcoming events:

May 29: Buzz Fest at BeeWeaver in Navasota

June 19: TBA Virtual Summer Clinic. Dr. Tom Seely will be the special guest speaker.

November 5-7: TBA Fall Convention will be in-person and held at Moody Gardens in Galveston.

Danessa then introduced our first speaker, Carson Bryant. Carson has been a member of FBBA since 2017 and a longtime fan of honey bees since being introduced to beekeeping by his mother many years ago in Dallas. Carson shared with us a video that covered his journey in developing the ArkHive, his floating bee

hive system for flood-prone apiaries. After the video, Carson answered questions and several members were interested in talking to Carson further.

Our next speaker was Lynne Jones, our Secretary-Treasurer. Lynne provided details on another major change in the rules for beekeepers selling honey in Texas.

Honey is unique in that it is the only human food directly produced by an insect. It falls in a "never never land" of food safety rules. Like farm products it can be considered a "raw agricultural product" that is not changed in any way by the beekeeper as it is removed from the hive, extracted from the comb, sieved or strained then bottled, labeled and sold. In August 2018 the federal Food and Drug Administration weighed in, declaring officially that honey is indeed a "raw agricultural product" and should meet rules that apply to farm products.

Farm products are not the only type of food with their own niche in Texas food safety law. "Cottage foods" are on a very detailed list of products that can be produced and sold from a home kitchen. Simply put, food that can be safely stored at room temperature may be produced and sold from a home kitchen as "cottage food". All other foods must be produced in an FDA-registered food manufacturing facility. The facility must be licensed and inspected by the Texas Department of State Health Services and the product must meet TDSHS packaging, storage and labeling requirements.

The fact is that beekeepers have paid little attention to all this except for those that show up in Austin every two years trying to get laws passed. It seems that every time we turn around some new rule suddenly appears. The most recent allowed "small scale honey producers" to market up to 2,500 lbs (!!!) of honey with little or no food safety requirement beyond basic labeling and meeting onerous rules for the transaction itself.

In short, as long as it is pure and raw, beekeepers can now sell bottled honey to anyone in Texas, including grocery stores and restaurants with few restrictions.

More details can be found in an article Lynne wrote for the May edition of Texas Bee Supply's online magazine. Rather than include all the details here, you can read Options for Selling Honey in Texas, part 1 at <https://texasbeesupply.com/blogs/texas-bee-supply-monthly-magazine>.

Next, Lynne again conducted a door prize drawing for a Perfect Pocket Hive Tool, donated by Jeff McMullan which was won by Ron Rogers. (Door prizes won in 2021 have not been mailed, but will be distributed when in-person meetings resume.)

After a brief discussion, Craig announced that Bee-discussions would be on Thursday, April 29. The meeting was then adjourned.

Treasurer's Report

Our April treasury balance was \$3,511.36. Since then we collected \$10.00 in dues and a \$15.00 donation. We spent \$12.99 for the monthly email cost and \$42.99 for the annual web site domain name renewal. The resulting balance is \$3,480.38 (\$3,430.38 in our checking account, plus \$50.00 in cash to make change).

TEXAS A&M
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