



October, 2021

Fort Bend Buzz

the monthly newsletter of the Fort Bend Beekeepers Association

fostering safe, responsible, successful beekeeping

Tropical Storm Nicholas is long gone, but with the never ending COVID-19 pandemic, our October 12 meeting will be back to both in-person and online. In-person will be at Long Acres Ranch, 2335 Richmond Pkwy, Richmond, TX 77469 (where we met in August, not far from the Community Center where we used to meet). ZOOM contact information is the same as before (an email with clickable links will go out soon). Members that have not been vaccinated are strongly advised to attend our October meeting online. We'll be called to order at 7:30 pm after 30 minutes of socially distanced social time.

The Fort Bend COVID-19 risk is still at the highest level: **RED or HIGH COMMUNITY RISK**. Every one should get vaccinated, including booster shots after six months for those over 65 or with immune system difficulties. More than a million vaccine doses have been administered in Fort Bend County; 76.74% of the County's population has received at least one shot. Surely we will soon turn the corner on this awful import from China! Fort Bend County reports that we have thus far had 82,748 confirmed cases. That number is up 6,173 cases since our last newsletter or about 200 new cases in our community every day. It is good news that 77,036 have recovered, but the number of deaths in Fort Bend now stands at 903, with 65 families getting sad news since our September newsletter (two each day). Please keep these families in your thoughts and prayers.

Vaccination is safe, readily available, easily done and "free", so there are few legitimate excuses for not having been vaccinated. In fact all of us have been vaccinated for one thing or another: smallpox, mumps, measles, whooping cough, tetanus to name a few. For those that have traveled overseas, the list gets much longer. The vaccines aren't 100% effective, but they do prevent hospitalization and death. COVID-19 is easily transmitted and carries huge uncertainty of outcome. You may have few symptoms, but if you have symptoms resembling a cold, you should self-quarantine and get tested for the virus. If you do contract the disease, a few days in the ICU can wipe out your bank account even if you have good health insurance.

October meeting


The October 12 meeting of the Fort Bend Beekeepers Association will again be back to both online and "in person". We plan to be ZOOMing from our in-person meeting at Long Acres Ranch, 2335 Richmond Pkwy, Richmond, TX 77469. A clickable ZOOM link will go out by email. The LAR gate will be open until 8 pm. If you arrive after the gate has closed, the keypad code is 2337 ("bees" on your cell phone keypad). This code will only work during our meeting. We'll be called to order at 7:30 pm after 30 minutes of social time.

If you haven't been vaccinated, don't feel well or have a medical condition that concerns you, please join the ZOOM meeting rather than attending in person.

Our program topic for October will be the what, when, and why of winter preparations. Our seasons are sometimes screwy (like last year) so our winter prep is important.

2021 Dues

Fort Bend Beekeepers Association dues are \$5.00 per person per calendar year.

 If there is a sad bee on your newsletter address label this month it is a reminder that our records show that you have not paid dues for 2021.

If you haven't paid your dues and wish to continue your membership, you can send an email to info@FortBendBeekeepers.org to get info on mailing in your payment.

September Meeting Notes

Due to the imminent arrival of Tropical Storm Nicholas (not the one at the Yaschuk house), our September meeting was conducted by Zoom only. We had 22 Zoom logins.

President Craig Rench opened the meeting at 7:30 and then turned the meeting over to our speaker, Jeff McMullan.

Jeff is a longtime FBBA member. He was previously our Secretary-Treasurer and is the Editor of the **Fort Bend Buzz** and uncredited author of the *Ask a dozen beekeepers...* column each month. If you want to see your question in print, phone or email Jeff, then you can check to see if he can keep his story straight.

Our September program topic is the most serious pest of honey bees, *Varroa destructor*, commonly called varroa mite, or just varroa. His presentation was in part from material put out by the Honey Bee Health Coalition.

It is inevitable that a honey bee colony will be infested by varroa. If nothing is done to prevent it, the colony will most likely fail. The best approach is to proactively control mite levels before they threaten colony survival. It is important to understand the biology and population phases of both the bee and its parasite.

Adult females can be found feeding on bees. This is called the phoretic stage that lasts 4 1/2 to 11 days when honey bee brood is present. She enters brood cell before it is capped to begin her reproductive stage. She lays an egg that develops into a male mite then follows with eggs that will become female mites. Her offspring feed on the bee larva. Mating occurs in the capped cell between siblings. Varroa prefer drone brood because it is more robust and spend more time in its capped cell.

Ways to control varroa include:

1. Beekeeping Practices - screened bottom boards, monitoring mite drop and infestation levels, intentional brood breaks.
2. Genetic Controls - breeding selection for "hygienic behavior".
3. In-hive Controls: drone comb destruction, sugar-dusting, thymol/ organic acid products, pesticides.

"Live and Let Die" is not effective beekeeping. When you have a colony of bees that is infested with varroa, the colony is suffering. If your dog was suffering from fleas and ticks, you would treat their infestation. Likewise, you should treat your bees' infestation. When you allow a colony to die from varroa, you put other colonies at risk because the varroa will transfer to other bees rather than stay with the dying colony. Bees are expensive and if you are routinely replacing colonies every year, you'll find you are spending more on beekeeping than you need to. Without very careful breeder queen selection, you aren't making better bees. You might have some colonies that seem to be survivor stock, and you might even make more queens from them. But those queens are going to be open-mated and it will be hit-or-miss on what kind of bees you get from them.

Lynne Jones announced that if there was interest, she would like to conduct a trial run via Zoom of the "Options for Selling Honey in Texas" presentation she is giving at the

Brazos Valley Beekeeper School. From a show of hands, it was decided to do the presentation on Tuesday September 21 at 7:30 pm. An email invite will be sent to all FBBA members.

Lynne then conducted the door prize drawings. Jeff McMullan donated one of his Perfect Pocket Hive Tools (won by Andrew Marlowe). Bee Man Dan Jones donated a wooden grip frame lifter which was won by Norm Harris. These prizes must be picked up at an in-person meeting.

Ask a dozen beekeepers...

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

Q: What am I supposed to use for smoker fuel?

A: This is a perfect question since there are far more than 12 (a dozen) options for you. You came looking for another suggestion since an old-timer recommended that you use cattle dung. In fact, you just wanted to know if this was just a bad joke.

Honey bees are woodland creatures and the scent of smoke may mean that the forest is on fire. They prepare to evacuate their home by engorging on honey since future meals are at risk. Smoke also hides any alarm pheromones.

Smoke of any kind will trigger this behavior in the hive. It does not have to be unpleasant to the bees or the beekeeper. You should find your fuel selection to be easily tolerable. Almost anything that burns at a low temperature while producing smoke will work (fuel that burns too hot will injure bees). Smoke from cattle dung probably works so long as it is completely dry. If it still a bit fresh, you'll likely have a hard time getting it lit. If you give it a try, let us know what it smells like. Dry grass, leaves or pine straw works well and probably smells better than smouldering cow poop, but some beekeepers find the smoke to be too irritating for their eyes. It is probably not a good idea

to use grass that has been killed with herbicide. Wood shavings are probably best since they burn longer. Use a chain saw "longwise" to create stringy shavings from oak, pecan or, better yet, fruit trees like ornamental pear. Your bee jacket will begin to smell like a backyard barbecue.

Treasurer's Report

Our September treasury balance was \$3,754.60. Since our last report we collected \$80.00 in dues and received a \$15.00 donation from a member. Our only expense this month was the \$12.99 monthly email cost. The resulting balance is \$3,836.61 (\$3,786.61 in the checking account, plus \$50.00 in cash to make change for dues payments).

Margo "Mac" McDowell

1951 - 2021

Margo "Mac" McDowell, Master Volunteer Coordinator at Fort Bend County AgriLife Extension, passed away during the evening of October 7, 2021 after a brief and hard-fought battle with cancer. Those that have been lucky enough to know Margo will miss her friendship, smile, cheerful can-do attitude and sense of humor. Our thoughts are with Mac's husband, Jim Cowan, daughter Stephanie, son Shaun, and their families during these difficult times. Memorial plans are not yet available.

TEXAS A&M
AGRI LIFE
EXTENSION

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