Beekeeping: An Alternative Farm Enterprise

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Introduction: Honeybees provide pollination services to more than 90 million acres of commercial crops grown in the US. The USDA recently reported that general colony loss levels in 2009 were 29% and increased to 34% in 2010. Furthermore, honey bees can provide pollination services, improve crop yield and increase farm income when utilized as an alternative enterprise on small- farms. Objectives: Recruit and educate new beekeepers in order to increase current bee populations and diversify farm income. Additionally, an educational forum and support network will be developed for new, veteran and potential beekeepers. Methods: The agent organized and facilitated four beginning beekeeper short courses to help prospective beekeepers get their start in beekeeping. Secondly, the agent assembled a group of local stakeholders to provide technical expertise and leadership to the planning and establishment of a monthly educational forum. Results: Ninety-one percent of attendees (n=158) indicated they had the knowledge needed to successfully start their own colony. A follow-up survey revealed that 42% of participants made practice changes in their operations or started a new beekeeping operation. State records reveal that 39 attendees registered their colonies with the state. This represents 91 new bee colonies that harvested over 800 lbs of honey in Duval County during 2010. The Jacksonville Beekeepers Association was formed and has grown to one of the largest associations in the state with over 150 members. The monthly meetings were attended by 776 individuals in 2010. Furthermore, these individuals have volunteered over 450 hours educating people about the importance of honeybees at public events. This group also helped establish and manage two educational hives at Extension’s Urban Gardening facility.

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