

Backyard Beekeeping Encouraged to Battle Shortage

BRIAN BINGAMAN
The Reporter

LANSDALE, Pa. (AP) — You can thank the honeybees.

One-third of all food crops consumed in the U.S., from fruits to vegetables to wild-flowers to nuts to seeds, are pollinated by bees, making them a crucial part of agriculture.

However, development, new pesticides and new diseases are thinning the honeybee populations in both the U.S. and Europe, leading to what Temple University and Delaware Valley College adjunct apiculture professor Vincent Aloyo calls a “pollinator shortage.”

Last year’s stormy winter, wet spring and four-week drought didn’t help either.

“The value of bees isn’t the honey, but the pollination that they provide,” Aloyo said. “It’s really wonderful because they take care of the plants. There’s lots of plants that are in bloom.”

While there is a beekeeping club based out of the Montgomery County 4-H Center, Aloyo and Worcester resident Jim Bobb, chairman of the Eastern Apiculture Society, are also encouraging home beekeeping. According to Bobb, there’s even a “Beekeeping for Dummies” book.

The early spring has made it tricky for beekeepers. Honeybees do not hibernate, so as soon as the weather got nice enough, they started pollinating and raising their young.

“That pollen is what stimulates them,” Bobb said. The honey harvest in Pennsylvania, which normally happens in May



In this March 12 photo, Vincent Aloyo checks the brood in one of the two honeybee hives at Temple University, Ambler campus in Upper Dublin Township, Pa.

and June, looks to come early as a result. But the fear is that since the bees got started early, they might also go through their personal food supply of honey too quickly and starve.

There are ways around that, Bobb said. The first is to create food for them. “What we feed the bees is sugar ... with water,” he said, describing an icing substance, called fondant, that the beekeeper puts on top of the hives.

The fondant is then switched with sugar syrup. The other method is to divide the

hive to “make them think there’s a lot of work to do at home.”

Because every hive needs a queen bee, the queenless half of the hive needs to have female eggs placed into it. Building a colony of bees is as easy as buying a kit, said Aloyo, a resident of Whitpain who has been beekeeping since 1966.

“Most people buy a package of bees (and a queen),” he said, adding that hive construction materials, and important devices like a smoker and a hive opening tool, are also needed to get started.

AP/The Reporter photo by Geoff Patton

Iowa Governor, Vilsack Defend ‘Pink Slime’ Beef Product

MIKE GLOVER
Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — Iowa Gov. Terry Branstad and U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack joined Wednesday to defend a beef product known by its critics as “pink slime,” calling the meat safe and nutritious.

Branstad and Vilsack said the product, sold by its maker as “lean, finely textured beef,” has been unfairly maligned by the media, prompting a public uproar about how the meat is produced and then used in hamburger.

The concerns have led a number of supermarket chains to stop offering the meat and led its maker, South Dakota-based Beef Products Inc., to suspend operations at plants in Texas, Kansas and Iowa.

“I’ve said this hundreds of times,” said Vilsack, a former two-term Democratic governor of Iowa. “This product is safe. There’s no question about it. We’ve said that repeatedly and we’ll continue to say it.”

Branstad was to join with other officials Thursday in South Sioux City, Neb., to tour the single Beef Products plant where the product is still made. He plans to eat some of the meat to demonstrate it’s safe.

Under the system used to make what some have dubbed “pink slime,” fatty bits of meat left over from other cuts are heated to about 100 degrees and spun to remove most of the fat. The lean mix then is compressed into blocks for use in ground meat. The product is exposed to ammonium hydroxide gas to kill bacteria, such as E. coli and salmonella.

“I believe the national media have permeated this issue with a poisonous tone that is detrimental to the beef industry,” Branstad said.

Branstad said the process produces extremely lean beef that is healthier than regular cuts, making it a good choice for health-conscious consumers.

In response to complaints about its decision to remove the product, the West Des Moines-based grocery chain Hy-Vee said it will sell beef with and without the ingredient at its 235 stores.

Following questions about the product, the USDA announced it would offer schools a choice of taking 95 percent lean beef patties made with the filler or less lean bulk ground beef without it. The USDA this year is contracted to buy 111.5 million pounds of ground beef for the National School Lunch Program.

Earlier Wednesday, Branstad, along with the governors of Kansas, Nebraska and Texas as well as the lieutenant governor of South Dakota, issued a statement praising the meat product and urged supermarkets to again begin offering the beef.

Failure to do so, they said, would lead to lost meat production jobs and higher prices.

“By taking this safe product out of the market, grocery retailers and consumers are allowing media sensationalism to trump sound science,” the statement said. “This is a disservice to the beef industry, hundreds of workers who make their livings producing this safe product and consumers as a whole.”

Farmers Consider Modifying Planting Decisions

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Although decisions on what to plant essentially took place last summer or fall when farmers ordered seed and other inputs, now is the time many consider tweaking those plans, says an Ohio State University Extension agricultural economist.

Barry Ward, production business management leader for OSU Extension, said both corn and soybean prices have been up and down since harvest.

“Farmers usually look at those signals as they fine-tune plans for planting,” Ward said. “They have the ability to make changes as long as they haven’t done any kind of field activity, like applying anhydrous ammonia or pre-emergent herbicides, that would prohibit them from switching.”

“And, every year we have different weather considerations — last year, some farmers switched from corn to soybeans be-

cause of all that rainfall and the lateness of planting,” he said.

This year, corn prices remain strong despite the fluctuations since fall, but recently soybean prices have strengthened in comparison, Ward said.

“The marketplace is sending signals that we might try to find more bean acres,” he said. “Soybeans still aren’t showing a better profit per acre, but the improved soybean prices are a consideration to keep in mind.”

Of course, input costs and agronomic considerations also come into play. Rotating crops decreases insect and disease pressure, and the nitrogen-fixing ability of soybeans allows farmers to reduce costs and applications of fertilizer on corn the following year.

But in the past few years, more farmers have weighed the benefits of crop rotation against the outlook of strong corn prices and have made the decision to plant corn after corn, Ward said.

Yet basing decisions on market trends can be precarious.

“Trying to outguess the market is sometimes iffy,” he said. “It’s a guessing game, and some farmers look at the possibilities and decide just to stay with their normal rotations. This is a decision every farmer needs to make based on their own enterprise budgets and their own situation.”

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