

Elm Fork Beekeepers Association

Member's Spotlight

Interview series featuring members of the EFBA so we can all get to know each other and our community of beekeepers.

Six questions with Byron Compton, local beekeeper and Webmaster of EFBA

Why Honey Bees?

We were looking for an agricultural activity to qualify for Ag Valuation on our property and didn't want to do cattle or goats and our land is too hilly and wooded for hay. A friend recommended we look at Beekeeping. We took an orientation class and decided we could do that! And we LOVE it!



How and when did you first become involved with beekeeping?

In 2013 we moved to Sadler from San Antonio to some land we purchased in 1985 – always planned to retire here. As stated above, we needed to do something to cut the taxes on our 15 acres. We found a Groupon for a 4-hour orientation class for \$20. We took the class and ordered our first two Nuc's the next week. By the second year we had 7 hives and 25 the third year.

What are you currently doing with honey bees?

We have over 30 colonies now split between Grayson and Fannin counties. We offer honey – liquid and comb - and Lisa makes a variety of products from the wax – Lip Balm, Body Butter, Lotion Bars, and Furniture Wax. We are registered with the TAIS as a Commercial Beekeeper, and have a Food Manufacturing License. We sell online at our website STGFARMS.COM, but most of our business is from word of mouth from very satisfied customers. We usually sell out of all our honey by Christmas. We also offer mentoring services to others who want to get into Beekeeping, either for their own use or to also get Ag Valuation.



What goals do you have as a beekeeper?

We are working towards producing Nuc's for sale next year and producing more honey for sale. We are also

going to get into Queen rearing, mostly for our own use but also for sale once we get a handle on the regulations for selling Queens. I'm in the Texas Master Beekeepers Program at the Apprentice Level and working towards the Advanced Level. Ultimately, I would like to grow to 50-100 hives (but Lisa has to OK the extra work...!!!). When I achieve my Master Beekeepers accreditation and finally retire from my regular full-time job in IT Consulting, we might go into offering classes similar to what Texas Bee Supply offers.

Any past problems or failures with bees that you care to share?

Many, many, many...

Our first "failure" was when we installed our first two Nuc's. We picked them up from Garland late – about 5 PM. By the time we got home it was almost dark and we tried to rush to get them installed. In our haste, we failed to get all the zippers closed. Also, Lisa didn't think much about it but she wasn't wearing full length pants. Well the bees got mad and found their way into both our suits and up her pants legs. Luckily, we were in a field where no one could see us but we were running around stripping off our jackets and pulling our pants down to get the bees out. Our other failures are pretty typical of new beekeepers – not recognizing when a colony is too weak to make it through the winter, and pulling Supers but not extracting the honey for over a week – most of the frames were ruined with SHB larvae that had hatched and covered the capped honey.

Any advice or encouragement you would like to offer to new beekeepers or possible future beekeepers?

Read, read, read, and read some more books on bees, magazines, and online articles. Take in all the advice and recommendations you can and then figure out what works for YOU. Not all YouTube videos are worth your time. Never hesitate to ask another beekeeper for advice – and find a GOOD Mentor. Keep an open mind on advice you receive and use the knowledge you gain to weigh the pros and cons of hive management decisions. Keeping bees has lots of ups and downs. Enjoy the ride!